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# Cultural Identity, Communication, and Cultural Reentry: Experiences of American Students

Yuliya Kartoshkina

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CULTURAL IDENTITY, COMMUNICATION, AND CULTURAL REENTRY:  
EXPERIENCES OF AMERICAN STUDENTS

by

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Bachelor of Education, Lviv Pedagogical College, 2001

Bachelor of Arts, University of North Dakota, 2005

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

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for the degree of

Master of Arts

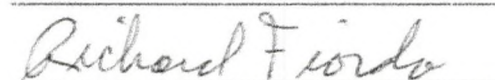
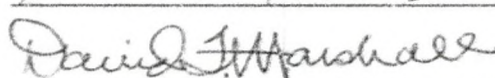
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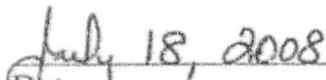
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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences of American students who returned home after studying abroad for a semester or two through the University of North Dakota (UND). Seventy-nine UND students participated in this study: 13 were interviewed and 66 participated in an on-line survey. The most important findings are summarized below. First, whereas researchers and theorists predominantly propose a negative model of approaching cross-cultural experiences, interview and survey respondents among UND students expressed mostly mixed feelings related to reentry rather than mostly negative ones. Second, more than half of them reported various communication problems with their relatives and friends who were unable to understand and relate to their cross-cultural experiences. Communication with friends seemed to be more challenging than communication with relatives. This finding expands the limited research in this area. Third, most of the students experienced changes in cultural identity by reporting the development of critical and appreciative perspectives of their home culture as well as new perspectives on the world. This finding points to a new approach that can be taken to understand changes in cultural identity by emphasizing the idea of treating these changes as a learning process and not only as a stable outcome of cross-cultural experiences, as it was previously done. Fourth, communication strategies were mentioned more often as one of the reentry strategies, adding to the existing research. Fifth, the study reveals the interconnectedness between cultural identity, communication and cultural reentry, which

was not previously explored. It is suggested that due to changed cultural identities through study abroad experiences, students can experience various discomfort feelings as well as communication problems with family and friends. However, with certain communication strategies, they can decrease these challenges and learn how to reflect on their experiences, which can promote personal growth. The results of this study can be used by international educators and researchers or education abroad advisors to make reentry of their students more effective and beneficial.



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The American novelist Thomas Wolfe noticed that a person can not go home again once he or she has left a birth place to travel to new places. Steven Foster, an American scholar and writer in his book, *The Book of the Vision Quest: Personal Transformations in the Wilderness* (1992), explains the return to a home country in the following way:

You will not come back to the “same old thing.” What you return to has changed because you have changed. Your perceptions will be altered. You will not incorporate into the same body, status, or world you left behind. The river has been flowing while you were gone. Now it does not look like the same river.  
(p. 31)

These observations can be used to describe what people might think and feel when they return to their home country after living or studying abroad. They might think that it is easy to return to the country they grew up in and where everything is very familiar. However, they might not realize that they changed as well as the members of their home culture. People are not usually aware that they belong to a certain culture that formed who they are and how they live their lives. After experiencing a different reality in a different country and acquiring new perspectives on life, they start to change. This

change, however, is not very visible to them. Only after these people return home will they start to realize and reflect on their experiences and how it changed their perspectives of themselves, others, and the world around them. However, these realizations might not be easy and might take time and effort.

This study seeks to understand the transformations that happen to a person due to cross-cultural experiences. This chapter will present the background of the study and explain why this study was conducted. It also will briefly describe how this study was designed and conducted. A preview of the chapters will be given last.

### *Background of the Study*

This study was conducted for various reasons. As a researcher, I have a strong interest in the area of cross-cultural experiences due to my traveling experiences and constantly increasing understanding of them through education and conduct of various studies. The education abroad advisors at the University of North Dakota (UND) also inspired the study when they shared with me their desire to learn about the reentry experiences of their students. This study seeks to assist UND students and their education abroad advisors by providing concrete suggestions for cultural reentry.

### *The Researcher's Role*

I am intrigued and fascinated by the idea of exploring various cultures, crossing cultural borders, and developing new perspectives and understandings of myself as a human being, other people, and the world. An interest in cultures was already sparked in me in childhood. Being born in Ukraine, I grew up by being exposed to two cultures simultaneously, Russian and Ukrainian. At school I learned more languages and received an opportunity to practice my English when I won a scholarship to study abroad in the

United States. I spent the whole school year studying at the University of North Dakota. I learned new things about myself and my abilities, improved many skills, learned about a new culture and also about my own culture through comparing it to other cultures. However, when I returned to Ukraine, I experienced various challenges. I was glad to come home, but I realized that my cultural experiences changed me and it was unexpectedly hard to adjust to my own culture. After coming back to the United States to continue my education, I wanted to learn how to reflect on my cultural experiences. I changed my major from Education to International Studies to be able to learn more about international issues and expand my knowledge and understanding of world cultures. After completing my degree, I realized that I only slightly touched the tip of the iceberg. Thus, I started my Masters in Communication with an emphasis on international and intercultural communication to explore the connection between culture and communication. While deciding on my thesis topic, I wanted to make a study that on one hand would contribute to my understanding of cross-cultural experiences and on the other hand would be practical and helpful.

### *The Research Context*

I contacted education abroad advisors at the University of North Dakota and discussed changes that might be an asset for their program. They pointed out that there is a strong need to understand the reentry experiences of UND students. The University of North Dakota has a good pre-departure orientation that is designed to prepare students to study abroad. It covers various areas, such as health and safety abroad, financial preparation, assembling of documents, academic issues, health and safety, and cultural tips. Cultural tips include an overview of culture shock and how to deal with it. However,



at the present moment there is no program before they go abroad that prepares them to return home. The only possibility that exists for the returning students is to join the small group called Student Leaders. These are UND students who assist education abroad advisors by conducting various orientation programs, workshops, and presentations on study abroad programs. Thus, this study seeks to fill in the gap in understanding what UND students might experience during reentry and to develop suggestions for education abroad advisors on how to make their experiences more successful and effective.

### Design of the Study

To understand in-depth the reentry experience of UND students and the factors that contribute to their experiences, I decided to conduct a qualitative study. Two methods were chosen when designing the study, interviews and a survey. Interviewing was chosen to provide the participants with the opportunity to describe in detail their reentry experiences. An electronic survey was chosen to reach a large population over a small period of time and to gain perspectives in addition to those obtained through interviews. Before conducting interviews and the survey, I completed the required Institutional Review Board training, and received the necessary approvals for human subject research projects. The research population studied consisted of U.S. students who went abroad for a semester or two between the Fall 2003 and Spring 2007 semesters through University of North Dakota study abroad programs. I divided the population into two groups. The first group consisted of Student Leaders, UND education abroad ambassadors who studied abroad in the past. The second group consisted of various UND students who studied abroad to ensure the feedback of people who dealt with reentry on their own. I designed interview questions by consulting the literature on culture and

cross-cultural experiences. Based on the information that came from the interviews, I prepared the online survey that reflected the themes from the interviews.

### Conduct of the Study

After I gathered the data from the interviews and the survey, I went through various stages of reading data, finding common themes, rereading data, revising the literature, and dividing themes into categories. During the first stage when the data from the interviews was collected and transcribed, I read it several times to develop a conceptual understanding of *what*, *how* and *why* research questions and respondents' answers connected to reentry experiences of UND students. During the second stage, I collected the data from the electronic survey and identified the emerging themes where four themes were matching the ones that came out from the interviews and one was new. During the third stage, after major themes were identified, I consulted the literature to compare my themes with those present in previous studies accomplished by various scholars. I divided my collected data into four categories and formulated four general questions that served as the main instruments for data analysis:

- 1) What experiences did UND students have when coming back to the United States after studying abroad?
- 2) What transformations did UND students undergo in their cultural identities after studying abroad?
- 3) What communication problems did UND students have when coming back to the United States after studying abroad?
- 4) What action strategies did UND students utilize during cultural reentry?



During the fourth stage, I matched the questions from the interviews and the survey to connect to the above questions, interpreted the connections between them, and developed the possible ways of explanations of the reentry experiences of UND students. During the last stage, I drew the conclusions and developed recommendations for future research, for education abroad advisors, and for future study abroad students.

### Preview of the Chapters

This first chapter, *Introduction*, presents the background of the study by introducing the role of the researcher in the study and the research context to explain why this research was conducted. The research design, including research methods, and the population is described. Overview of how the research was conducted follows. The second chapter, *Literature Review*, will identify and interpret the literature related to the directions of the study. It will review theoretical frameworks and research studies related to culture, cultural identity, communication, and cross-cultural experiences and will seek to create the framework for a new perspective in considering cultural reentry.

The third chapter, *Methods*, will describe the research design, the methods chosen for this research, and the distinctive features of the research population. It will also explain how the data was collected and analyzed. The fourth chapter, *Results*, will present the results of the study and will be divided into the themes that came out of the initial research analysis. The fifth chapter, *Analysis*, will show how the results of the current study support, contradict, or add something new to the existing literature. The last chapter, *Summary*, will present the short review of the thesis chapters and the study, and will describe recommendations for education abroad advisors and future research directions.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

People who return to a home culture after living in a foreign country go through different changes while initially adapting to a new culture and later readapting to the previously familiar culture. Various studies have been conducted to examine the kaleidoscope of their experiences. While numerous researchers have focused on the cultural adaptation to a foreign culture (Adler, 1987; Anderson, 1994; Ady, 1995; Furnham, 1988; Kim, 2001; Matsumoto et. al, 2001; Shaules, 2007; Ward et al., 2001; Weaver, 1994), fewer scholars have discussed the process of returning to the home culture (Adler, 1981, 1987; Brabant et al., Cox, 2004; Gaw, 2000; Sussman 2000, 2001, 2002; Yoshida et al., 2002). This study attempts to extensively explore what has been known as *cultural reentry*, the process of returning home after living in a foreign country for several months or longer.

Cultural reentry can be approached from a variety of perspectives. The literature that is reviewed for this study examines the process of returning to the home culture through two thematic lenses: 1) culture and cultural identity and 2) cross-cultural experiences of living in a foreign culture and returning to a home culture. Theories and models of intercultural adaptation and readaptation are reviewed to describe several approaches taken to explain and understand cross-cultural experiences.



## Culture and Cultural Identity

One of the purposes of this study is to understand how culture influences the formation and transformations of individuals and their cultural identities. It presents various definitions and functions of culture that have been developed in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and communication. The formation of cultural identity and the factors that contribute to its changes are explained. Communication is described as an important element in the formation and transformations of cultural identity that individuals undergo through various cross-cultural experiences.

### *The Definitions of Culture*

Culture has been an enigma that has puzzled, fascinated, and inspired various scholars to define and understand it (Baldwin et al., 2006; Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1997; Jackson & Garner, 1998; Kim, 2001; Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998, 2004). This concept has as many dimensions as every culture in the world has, and it would be impossible to review all of them here. Already in the 1950s, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, in their book *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, identified more than 160 definitions of culture and categorized them. Present-day definitions reviewed by Baldwin, Faulkner, Hecht, and Lindsley (2006) concentrate on the following dimensions: culture as a structure (system or framework of cultural elements); culture as a function (what culture does or accomplishes, the needs it serves); culture as a process (social construction of culture); culture as a product (cultural artifacts); culture as a refinement (achievement of higher intellect or morality by an individual or a group); culture as power or ideology (political or ideological dominance); and culture as group membership (shared

understanding of the world, communication system, etc.). This study is aimed at understanding how culture influences the formation and transformations of an individual, and at reflecting on the definitions of culture that cover such dimensions as structure, function, process, and group membership.

Jackson and Garner (1998) defined culture as “a set of patterns, beliefs, behaviors, institutions, symbols, and practices shared and perpetuated by a consolidated group of individuals connected by an ancestral heritage and a concomitant geographical reference location” (p. 44). Stella Ting-Toomey (1999) asserted that culture encompasses three dimensions. On a first dimension, culture is a diverse pool of knowledge, of shared realities and clustered norms, constituting the learning system of meanings in a particular society. On a second dimension, these learning systems of meanings are shared and transmitted through everyday interactions among the members of a cultural group, from one generation to the next. On the third dimension, culture facilitates members’ capacity to survive and to adapt to their external environments (p. 9). Drawing from these definitions, culture in this study will be defined as *a set of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, symbols, meanings, and knowledge that is created by a particular group of people to survive in a particular environment, and is transmitted from generation to generation through verbal and nonverbal communication.*

To understand the formation of an individual from a cultural perspective, it is necessary to take into consideration all the elements of this definition of culture. It is also necessary to realize that these elements differ from culture to culture. The differences between cultures have been approached from multiple perspectives. For instance, Edward T. Hall (1976) approached cultural differences from the communication perspective and



developed the concepts of high and low context communication when studying Asian and Western cultures. According to Edward T. Hall (1976), in high-context cultures, communicators rely more on the context of a message than on its content, whereas in low-context cultures, communicators rely more on the content of a message than on its context (p.91). Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner (1998, 2004) developed a framework that approaches cultural differences by exploring fundamental challenges that humans face when organizing social communities. They view culture as a group of people that find different solutions to survival. Chosen solutions to various survival situations become standards for a certain cultural group and are passed from one generation to another, acquiring symbolic significance. Possible solutions that were considered by previous generations become forgotten in the everyday awareness and become the absolute truths about how things can be done.

Another perspective on cultural differences is connected with psycho-emotional programming of a culture (Hofstede, 1980, 1983, 1997). Hofstede proposed five distinctive value orientations such as power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance and “Confucian dynamism.” Shaules (2007) observes that once the initial psycho-emotional programming is imprinted, people’s affective lives are attached to these particular patterns and it would be really difficult to learn new patterns (p. 52).

All the mentioned perspectives on culture and its differences assist in explaining why people might face challenges going from one cultural group to another. Ability to adapt to a foreign environment, learn new patterns of communication and behavior, and understand foreign values might be very challenging. The next part will concentrate on

several important functions that culture serves to help individuals survive and be accepted in a cultural group.

### *The Functions of Culture*

Culture has many functions, some of the most important being to assist humans in finding their places in a given society and in adapting to changing environments (Ting-Toomy, 1999; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998, 2004; Schaules, 2007).

According to Ting-Toomy (1999), human beings need culture to form a “*safety-net*” that helps them form cultural identity, feel included in groups, be aware of boundaries, develop adaptation, and coordinate communication (p.15). According to Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner (1998, 2004), members of a group use culture as a survival mechanism that helps them deal with various challenges, both internal and external, and obtain a feeling of comfort and safety.

Culture also has the function of group inclusion and satisfies humans’ belonging needs (Ting-Toomey, 1999). People do not have to justify and explain their behaviors to other people living in the same culture, because they share traditions, values, beliefs and meanings, and they know what to expect from one another (Gudykunst, 1995). However, being exposed to only one culture, they might develop *ethnocentrism*, the tendency to perceive and interpret the behavior of others based on the cultural beliefs and behaviors of a home culture (Matsumoto & Juang, 2004). The feelings of comfort and safety within a given culture prevent people from understanding the views of other cultures on the world and reality (Schaules, 2007).

Culture also provides the frame of reference to answer the question: Who am I? It creates meaning through cultural values and norms that give people significance to their



identities (Ting-Toomey, 1999). For example, in the Japanese culture that emphasizes collectivity, people define themselves in terms of meeting the expectations of other people. In the U.S. culture that emphasizes individuality, people define themselves as less dependent on any set of social relations than in Japan (Cousins, 1989).

After reviewing various cultural functions, it is necessary to concentrate on how culture contributes to the formation of cultural identities, how individuals view themselves, others, and various cultures in the world.

### *The Formation of Cultural Identity*

People are born into a culture, and they learn everything about themselves and the world from the members of their cultural group and the surroundings (Ting-Toomey, 1999). People become accustomed with looking through certain lenses provided by their culture, and thus they form their specific cultural identities. *Cultural identity*, states Yep (1998), “is a social construction that gives the individual an ontogenetic status (a sense of ‘being’) and expectations for social behavior (ways of ‘acting’)” (p. 79). Cultural identity is formed through the process of learning one’s culture from previous generations, known as enculturation. According to the anthropologist Kottak (2005), *enculturation* is a process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to becoming functioning members of their cultural group. With the help of communication, people develop the sense of belonging to a certain culture, and accept the language, traditions, heritage, ancestry, thinking patterns, and social structures of that culture (Kim, 2001, p.47).

This formation happens both unconsciously and consciously through various interactions and observations (Fong & Chuang, 2004). After a child is born, he or she is

taught a set of cultural beliefs, values and norms, at first in the family by parents and relatives, and later in institutions such as schools and universities through pedagogical practices. Therefore, a child does not realize that this is only one way of living, feeling and thinking in this world (Baldwin et al., 2006). Other factors, such as physical appearance, racial traits, skin color, language usage, mass media, peer groups, and self-appraisal, also contribute to the construction of cultural identity. Therefore, even adults often do not realize that they are cultural products and sometimes take their home culture for granted (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 30).

There are different stages in the formation of cultural identity. According to Phinney (1993), cultural identity development involves three stages: unexamined cultural identity, cultural identity search, and cultural identity achievement. During the first stage, a child accepts all the norms and values without questioning them and is not interested in examining the diversity around. During the second stage, after being confronted with cultural and racial issues, teenagers or adults start to question their identity or to explore who they are in a process that is not easy or fast. As Phinney points out, some of them might experience an identity crisis, a conflict between subjective identity (how one perceives oneself) and objective identity (how others perceive a person). People who experience an identity crisis feel that they belong to a certain ethnic, cultural or racial group, but that their peers reject them. The length of identity crises depends on the quality of the support from parents, siblings, friends, teachers, and counselors. Only when people accept their cultural identity, become confident of who they are, and understand where this confidence is coming from, do they reach the third stage of cultural identity



achievement, developing ways of dealing with stereotypes and being clear about personal meanings of their culture.

Culture plays an important role in the formation of cultural identities by providing stable patterns of thinking and living for the individuals brought up in certain cultural groups. This process of cultural identity formation takes time and effort from both, individuals and surrounding cultural members. However, cultural identity is not stable, as Fong and Chang (2004) noticed, and is changing under the influence of various factors. Thus, it is necessary to explore how and why this happens.

### *Change of Cultural Identity*

Like the formation of cultural identity, change in cultural identity is a complex process. When a person is exposed for a period of time to a different culture with a different set of values, norms, and beliefs, his or her cultural identity starts to transform. The process of such transformation is known as *intercultural adaptation* in which people move from a familiar environment to an unfamiliar one and stay there for a period of time (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Over time, as individuals adapt to various intercultural challenges, their cultural identity can be transformed significantly. Smith (1998) observed that “if living in another culture causes change, we can expect part of that change to be identity-altering” (p. 306).

According to Ting-Toomey (1999), this transformation in cultural identity is influenced by various factors on three levels: on a systems’ level, on a personal level, and on an interpersonal level (p. 235). Systems-level factors include the host culture’s socioeconomic conditions and local institutions, the host culture’s attitude on cultural assimilation and cultural pluralism, and the degree of cultural differences between the



host culture and the newcomer's culture. Individual-level factors include personal motivation to leave the home country, expectations towards the host country, cultural knowledge, and personality attributes. Interpersonal-level factors include contact network with members of host culture, mediated contact factors (use of mass media), and interpersonal skills.

Transformation of cultural identity is challenging because a person goes through various stages of adaptation and readaptation. However, the process of adaptation is essential for human existence and growth. Ruben (1983) observed: "Living systems act instinctively to meet the challenge or threat and to restore balance and harmony. Once regained, equilibrium continues until the system is controlled by new environmental demands" (p. 137). Through successful adaptation to a new cultural environment, people can develop new understandings and behaviors (Kim, 2001). Kim (2001) observes that after successfully adapting to the new environment, people will be able to take off the old lenses of looking at the world and themselves, relearn and rethink many things, and put on new lenses with new perspectives on thinking, feeling, and behaving. These transformations can lead to changes in cultural identity that will modify how people view themselves, their own culture, other cultures, and the world in general.

Thus, intercultural experiences can be very powerful and can lead to various transformations in cultural reentry. Now it is necessary to concentrate on the role of communication in this formation and transformation of cultural identity.

### *Communication and Cultural Identity*

Communication is an inherent component in learning culture and in adapting to the surrounding environment, as various scholars have stated (Collier, 1989; Hall, 1959;

Kim, 2001; Shaules, 2007; Ting-Toomey, 1999). Humans are not born with fixed cultural identities, but they learn cultural norms, values, views on reality, and appropriate cultural behavior through verbal and nonverbal interactions with others. In order to understand each other and be accepted in a certain society, people create shared meanings. Those meanings are connected with and created by the culture into which a person is born. One of the first who noticed the connection between communication and culture was the anthropologist Edward T. Hall, who in his book, *The Silent Language*, affirmed, "Culture is communication and communication is culture" (Hall, 1959, p. 186). This view is supported by various present-day researchers. Kim (2001) observes that it is culture that programs members of a certain society to interpret verbal and nonverbal messages in a certain way, and that creates an individual's meaning of what is real, true, beautiful, and good (p. 47). Being born in a certain culture, people learn to think, feel, and behave according to the "programs" set up by their home culture. Gerbert Hofstede (1997) describes culture as a "software of the mind."

According to Collier (1989), cultural identities are negotiated, co-created, reinforced and challenged through communication. Thus, when people get into a new environment, they start to be aware of the elements of their own culture and learn elements of the new culture. This process of learning a new culture and analyzing the home culture is done through communication that is known as intercultural, which has been defined as a symbolic exchange process between the individuals from different cultural groups when they negotiate shared meanings in an interactive situation (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 17). It is not easy to create shared meaning between people who learned specific cultural elements that might differ significantly. When people learn new



ways of looking at life, the world, themselves and others due to the exposure to a new culture, their cultural identity is transforming, and this happens by means of communication with the members of the new culture.

After reviewing the role of communication in formation and reformation of cultural identity, it is necessary to focus on specific cultural experiences that lead to various transformations in cultural identity. The next subchapter will explore various studies on cultural experiences of various cultural groups and will seek to explain the specificities of cultural adaptation and readaptation in concrete studies.

### Cross-Cultural Experiences

With a constantly globalizing world, cultural experiences can greatly vary, ranging from watching a foreign movie or reading an article about a foreign country to experiences of living, studying, or working abroad. Differences in these experiences not only vary in degree of immersion into a foreign culture but also in the outcomes of such immersions, causing various changes in personal and social lives of people. This study is interested in examining experiences of people who temporarily reside in a foreign country known as *sojourners* (Ward, Bocher, & Furnham, 2001, p. 21). The following literature review will examine what has been done to explore and explain their cultural experiences by focusing on cultural reentry.

### *Studies on Cultural Adaptation*

For many centuries people have been crossing borders for many reasons – travel, business, education, immigration, and others. However, the systematic research on how those people might adapt to a new culture started only in the 1950s and concentrated mostly on sojourners. Ward et al. (2001) in their detailed historical overview on cultural

adaptation studies pointed out that first research attempts to explain cultural adaptation of such sojourners as international students to a host culture were clinically oriented and were strongly related to the medical models of adjustment, mostly focusing on negative features of cultural transitions. In the 1980s, the new wave of research started to explore positive outcomes of cultural adaptation and concentrated on the learning experiences of the sojourners and the host culture members.

Most contemporary studies still reflect these two directions where one is linked to psychological models of stress and coping and another to the learning experiences of the sojourners.

Many recent studies (Adler, 1987; Anderson, 1994; Ady, 1995; Matsumoto et al., 2001; Ward, 1996; Ward et al., 2001; Weaver, 1994) showed that adapting to a new environment is not an easy process, and sojourners might experience culture shock that includes transformations on moral, affective, cognitive, and behavioral levels.

Anthropologist Kalervo Oberg (1954, 1960) defined *culture shock*:

Culture shock is brought on by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs or cues include the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situation of daily life: when to shake hands and what to say when we meet people; when and how to give tips; how to give orders to servants; how to make purchases; when to accept and when to refuse invitations; when to take statements seriously and when not.... Now when an individual enters a strange culture, all or most of these familiar cues are removed. He or she is like a fish out of water. (p. 1)

Over the years, culture shock has been studied as a psychological illness and emotional



reaction to learning (Adler, 1987). According to Fuhrman (1988), culture shock involves a sense of identity loss and identity deprivation (lack of status, profession, friends, possessions); identity strains that require psychological adaptation; identity rejection by members of a new culture, and identity confusion on predictability and loss of status. Sojourners lose their familiar environment, social support network, ability to understand the values of the new culture and communicate almost fully. Some studies focused on individual sojourners' frustrated reactions to the new environment (Anderson, 1994) or to the lack of such reactions (Ady, 1995). Besides identity crisis, Weaver (1994) points out two more causal explanations of culture shock are the loss of familiar cues and the breakdown of interpersonal communication.

However, another group of researchers claim that if managed wisely, every adaptive change can bring many benefits to a sojourner and opportunity to grow. Adler (1987) observes that the transition brought by culture shock leads to profound learning, growth, and self-awareness (Matsumoto et al., 2001). There is now a general agreement that culture shock activates, in most people, the motivation to adjust to a host culture (Kim, 2001; Sussman, 2000; Ting-Toomey, 1999). For example, Ting Toomy (1999) observes that if managed wisely, culture shock can enhance self-confidence, develop competence in social interactions, develop cognitive openness and flexibility, and have other benefits to sojourners (p. 246).

Social learning theory developed by Bandura and Walters (1963) emphasizes the acquisition of social skills through modeling and observational learning. The concepts from this theory were applied to the concept of cultural adjustment by putting emphasis on the behavioral acquisition of social skills appropriate for a culture other than one's

own (Cox, 2004). The research in this area identifies general cultural knowledge, length of residence, amount of contact with hosts, previous experience abroad, cultural distance, and intercultural training as factors influencing culture learning (Ward, 1996).

By reviewing two approaches to cultural adaptation, it becomes evident that cultural adaptation to a new environment can be stressful, but it carries the potential for effective learning experience and personal growth.

### *Studies on Cultural Reentry*

Cultural adaptation does not end when sojourners return home; it continues through their adaptation to their home culture and is known as *cross-cultural reentry*. Cultural reentry is the process that sojourners go through when they come back to their home countries from residing in a foreign country for an extended period of time (Adler, 1981). Sometimes it is associated with the *reentry shock*, a challenging experience that can be associated with unexpected shock when sojourners return to a formerly familiar and often unquestionable culture (Kohls, 2001).

### *Reentry Experiences*

The studies on cultural reentry started in the 1960s but did not receive as much attention as studies on cultural adaptation, mostly because the problems connected with it were not expected, neither by the researchers nor the sojourners (Ward, Bochner & Fuhrman, 2001). However, the more students travelled to study abroad, the more obvious the problems started to become to the researchers. Most recent researchers, such as Adler (1997), Arthur (2003), Cushner & Brislin (1997), Gaw (2000), and Kohls (2001) observed that returnees frequently report that it was harder for them to adjust to life back home than going abroad because they do not expect that coming back home can be



difficult. Many students do not realize that they return neither to the world they have left nor to the world they are expecting. A lack of appreciation for the degree of changed that happened to sojourners due to cross-cultural experiences increases the risk of adjustment problems and reentry shock (Gaw, 2000). Rogers and Ward (1993) examined re-entry expectations, experiences, and psychological adjustment of secondary school students from New Zealand. While still abroad, they were asked about their expectations of re-entry. After 4-10 weeks, they were asked to reflect on their actual experiences. It was found that most students had inaccurate expectations, and re-entry was much more difficult than it was anticipated.

Ward et al. (2001) points out two categories of difficulties connected with re-entry: social and psychological. Social difficulties might include communication problems with family and friends, social isolation, changes in cultural identity, and others.

As for *communication problems*, Martin (1986) investigated the role of communication in reentry relationships with parents, friends, and siblings and found that exposure to different cultural environment can lead to altered "meaning structure," including rules of social interactions (p. 4). Results of statistical analyses revealed that the degree of positive and negative change reported by the sojourners varied with the particular type of relationship. Specifically, relationships with parents and siblings were perceived to have changed more positively than negatively, and relationships with friends were perceived to have changed both negatively and positively. Cushener and Brislin (1997) noticed that lack of interest that friends and relatives showed in sojourners' study abroad experienced created feelings of disappointment and frustration. Friends and



relatives might not have the capacity for understanding and listening cross-cultural experiences of sojourners (Wang, 1997). Lack of social support to share the experiences and to be able to reflect on them might lead to social isolation (Arthur, 2003). Storti (2003) noticed that even though parents might be more interested in their children's cross-cultural experiences, their understanding and appreciation is still limited.

*Changes in identity* might happen because sojourners acquired new cultural values, behaviors, meanings that do not fit into the home culture script. Kittredge (1988) interviewed American returnees and noted across interviews that returnees most often felt out of place upon return to the United States because they held different self-identities than prescribed by American mainstream norms. For example, one returnee reported that his being African-American overseas was never a personal issue because as he identified as an American, but upon return to the United States, he had to reckon with "the significance of being black" (p. 40). Sussman (2001) studied 44 American managers who lived abroad from 4 months to 6 years and examined their preparedness for repatriation, cultural identity change, and attributions of causality on the repatriation experience. He found that preparedness for repatriation and cultural identity change predicted repatriation distress. Those repatriates who were the least prepared and had the most cultural identity change experienced more severe repatriate distress. Walling, Eriksson, Messe, Ciovica, and Gorton (2006) explored the relationship between cross cultural reentry and cultural identity in twenty undergraduate college students who participated in short-term international mission trips. They found that students most frequently and extensively reported negative reactions to home culture that were followed by themes related to cultural awareness and personal growth.

Psychological difficulties include feelings of loneliness, anxiety, apathy, feeling of loss, anger, hostility, helplessness, and others (Brabant et al. 1990; Gaw, 2000; Stone Feinstein & Ward; Wang, 1997; Uehara, 1986). Stone Feinstein and Ward (1990) reported that *loneliness* was one of the most powerful predictors of mood disturbance in American women in Singapore. Gaw (2000) examined 66 American college students who studied abroad to determine if reverse culture shock influenced self-reported problem severity, willingness to see a counselor, and student support service usage. Several findings were that the returnees experiencing a high level of reverse culture shock were more likely to report more personal adjustment and shyness problems/concerns than were returnees experiencing a low level of reverse culture shock. Also, willingness to see a counselor for personal problems/concerns was not necessarily related to one's level of reverse culture shock. Rogers and Ward (1993) in their study of 20 returned secondary school students reported positive significant correlations between experienced reentry difficulties, depression, and anxiety. Several studies indicated that sojourners might experience *feeling of loss* when they leave their new friends, new culture, and newly adapted lifestyle (Wang, 1997). Some might feel loss in personal freedoms (Brabant et al. 1990), loss in cultural advantages, such as access to technology, library, fine arts (Cusher & Brislin, 1997) or loss of friends they made abroad.

All these social and psychological problems might be faced by the sojourners because they usually do not fully realize the growth and personal changes that they have undergone while living and studying abroad. Kidder (1992) interviewed 45 overseas-experienced Japanese university students and found the "dilemma for returnees is whether to maintain or trim the new aspects of themselves, the parts they picked up under



... any other flag" (p. 384). He found returnees struggling with changes resulting from their overseas experiences, such as physical changes (hair style and color changes, pierced ears, and clothing styles), behavioral changes (walking and posture style changes, non-verbal behavior changes), interpersonal communication style changes, language competence and accent changes, and career value changes.

It was also found that the duration and severity of re-entry shock varied from individual to individual and was dependent on personal qualities of an individual, the type of culture to which the individual had to adapt, and other factors. Some individuals may experience few, if any, effects of reentry, while others appear to have problems ranging from a few months to a year or longer (Adler, 1981; Carlisle-Frank, 1992).

### *Contributing Factors*

There have been many factors studied to understand the re-entry process and problems of sojourners (Brabant et al., 1990; Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963); Martin, 1984; Rorhlich and Martin, 1991). Martin (1984) outlined three groups of factors contributing to reentry problems that include: 1) background (gender, age, academic level, previous cross-cultural experience, and nationality; 2) host culture (location and duration of sojourn, degree of interaction with host culture, readiness to return home); and 3) reentry (reentry environment). *Background factors*, such as gender, were studied by many researchers. Rorhlich and Martin (1991) noticed that women reported more satisfaction after returning home than men did. However, Brabant, Palmer, & Gramling (1990) on the contrary found that it was harder for females to deal with reentry than for males. As one of the *host culture factors* examples, Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) noticed that individuals who went to Europe scored higher in their satisfaction levels on

reentry than did those who went to less developed countries. The reentry environment has also been found to play a considerable role in sojourner reentry adjustment. Martin (1984) found that relationships with friends changed negatively and this influenced reentry adjustment. In addition, research supports the hypothesis that those individuals who adapt successfully to the host culture have more overseas severe reentry adjustment problems than do those individuals who do not adapt well overseas (Sussman 2002). Other studied factors included value change, amount of information about the homeland, desire to return home, motivation of foreign sojourn, personal characteristics, as well as level of satisfaction in foreign country and at home (Lester, 2000; Sussman, 2002), differences between home and host cultures for U.S. study-abroad students (Raschio, 1988), and others.

### *Reentry Strategies*

Many studies have shown that students can develop successful coping strategies that can help in cultural adjustment (Brislin & Van Buren, 1974; Cox, 2006; Storti, 1997; Ward et al., 2001). Most of these strategies include the following categories: expecting the unexpected, managing change and loss, and communication. Several studies were conducted to understand if being prepared to face reentry challenges and changes in themselves, family, and friends can reduce reentry shock (Sussman, 2001; Weaver, 1994, Wang, 1997). Other researchers proposed that sojourners, who are aware of the changes they have experienced abroad, will be better able to process these changes (Marks, 1987; Moles, 1994). As for managing loss, several researchers (Butcher, 2000; Lester, 2000) pointed out the necessity to design reentry workshops that would help students to recognize the role of loss as part of returning home and help them in their mourning.



Rohrlich and Martin (1991) found that certain types of communication with host nationals were also associated with better repatriation adjustment. More recent research found that both communication with parents and with other repatriates was associated with more positive repatriation adjustment (Yoshida et al., 2002). Cox (2004) found that the closeness in relationships and satisfaction with use of information and communication technology were also related to repatriation adjustment. Several mediated forms of communication, such as e-mail and the Internet, received as high or higher ratings than some types of face-to-face communication than was predicted earlier.

Some researchers (Arthur, 2003; Cox, 2006; Wang, 1997) divided reentry strategies into pre-departure strategies and arrival to the home country strategies that include reentry workshops. Pre-departure strategies concentrate on the simple act of anticipating reentry difficulties. Reentry preparation can be treated as a “prerequisite” for students to maximize the benefits of studying abroad and to minimize the possible reentry difficulties (Westwood et al., 1986). Ward, Bochner, and Fuhrman (2001) stated that reentry transition can be difficult in many ways, but “social and psychological problems can be alleviated by preparation” (p. 165). Sussman (2001), who studied the relationship between psychological preparation for reentry and reentry difficulties, also found that psychological preparedness predicted fewer repatriation difficulties.

Arrival strategies concentrated on advising students to take time and avoid doing much right after they come back so as not to lose the initiative (Storti, 1997). Reentry workshops are designed to help students to educate themselves about possible transition difficulties such as reentry shock, cultural assumptions, and professional challenges (Cox, 2006). Workshop participation also can encourage returnees to think about the changes in



themselves and changes at home, and to reflect on how these changes could influence their reentry (Wang, 1997). During reentry workshops, students will be interacting with each other, which can stimulate affective experiences that prompt new learning or reframe reentry issues (Wang, 1997). Arthur (2003) summarized reentry workshops' goals for international students and suggested them to be reduced to three main ones. First, students need to be given an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and adaptation to a host country, how they have changed, their academic and personal accomplishments, and the strategies they developed to cope with the transition. Second, they touch on the same areas to reflect on their experiences and readaptation to their home country. It was suggested for workshop facilitators to introduce the home country not as a familiar place, but as a 'new 'culture (Martin, 1984). This can help students to appreciate changes in themselves, in their relationships, and their surroundings after returning home (Arthur, 2003).

### *Outcomes of Cross-Cultural Experiences*

The studies on outcomes of cultural experiences of sojourners were summarized by various contemporary researchers, such as Cox (2004) and Shaules (2007). Most of the previous studies on cultural adjustment outcomes have concentrated on the process of cultural adaptation to a host culture. Several researchers, such as Gao & Gudykunst (1990), Rogers & Ward (1993), Sussman (2001, 2002), Ward (1996), and Yoshida et al., (2002) listed the following sojourners' outcomes: favorable attitudes toward hosts, increased appreciation of home culture, broader worldview, reduction in ethnocentrism, increased cognitive complexity, greater self-awareness, psychological distress, perceptual maturity, mood states, health evaluations, feelings of acceptance and satisfaction, extent

of interaction with hosts, acquisition of culturally appropriate behaviors, academic competence, job performance, and others. In studies specifically focused on reentry, the following outcomes have been mentioned: anxiety, depression, social difficulty, attitudinal satisfaction culture shock, life hassles, repatriation distress feeling different, self-reflection/expressiveness, adjustment difficulty, acceptance, advantage, affirmation, negativity, and group conformity.

Several researchers made attempts to categorize all these outcomes. Cox (2004) mentioned the two most common domains: psychological (affective) and sociocultural (behavioral). Other researchers noticed that changes in cultural identity can be the third outcome in cultural adaptation (Berry, 1980; Berry & Sam, 1997; Bennett, 1993; Gudykunst, Wiseman, & Hammer, 1977; Hermans & Kempen; 1998; Kim, 2001, Sussman, 2000). However, most of these researchers have concentrated on studying changes in cultural identity and the formation of a new identity during adaptation to a new culture. Berry's (Berry, 1980; Berry & Sam, 1997) theory of acculturation patterns describes four patterns of immigrants' adjustment (separation, assimilation, integration, and marginalization) based upon whether individuals or groups identified with one, both or neither cultural group in an intercultural situation. Bennett (1993) conceptualized intercultural identity in two patterns of cultural marginality: constructive marginal and encapsulated marginal. *Constructive marginals* are able to integrate their cultural identities while *encapsulated marginals* experience conflict between the cultural perspectives they have learned. Kim (2001) delineated *intercultural identity* is an acquired identity that is constructed after the enculturation process during early childhood through the individual's communicative interactions with a new cultural environment.



Hermans and Kempen (1998) suggested that increasing intercultural contacts, globalization, and recombination of cultural practices can lead to *cultural hybridization* that could consequently lead to the development of new forms in cultural identities. Gudykunst, Wiseman, & Hammer (1977) suggested that sojourners might develop *third culture perspectives* that enable individuals to integrate the best practices and approaches of the two cultures. Kim (2001) termed this combined identity *intercultural identity*, an acquired identity constructed through the individual's communicative interactions with a new cultural environment.

Much less has been done to examine changes in the cultural identity of sojourners during reentry experience. Adler (1997) emphasizes three groups of returnees that use different strategies in readapting to their home cultures: resocialized, alienated, and proactive. *Resocialized* returnees do not realize that they learned new skills in the new culture. They try to fit into their home culture as soon as possible and do not have many problems in adjusting. *Alienated returnees* are aware of the new skills and changes that happened during their study abroad. However, they have difficulties in applying those new skills and understandings into their home culture and might become outsiders. *Proactive returnees* are also aware of their new skills and changes and try to do their best to reflect on them and incorporate into their lives in the home cultures. Sussman (2000) classifies cultural identity during reentry in the four patterns labeled subtractive, additive, affirmative, and intercultural. The subtractive pattern results in repatriates feeling less comfortable with home culture norms and values, while the additive pattern results in feeling more similar to the host culture norms and values. Both of these patterns are theorized to have more difficulty during repatriation. The other two patterns, affirmative



repatriates (strong home identification) and intercultural repatriates (identify with both cultures in their self-concept) experience less difficulty during repatriation. Cox (2004) uses different terms to describe cultural identity outcomes after cultural adaptation: home favored, host favored, integrated and disintegrated. Walling et al., (2005) studied the relationship between cultural identities and reentry experiences and found that out of 20 undergraduate students studied, the majority developed negative perspectives on their home culture during reentry; they also acquired knowledge cultural diversity and an understanding of what is diversity.

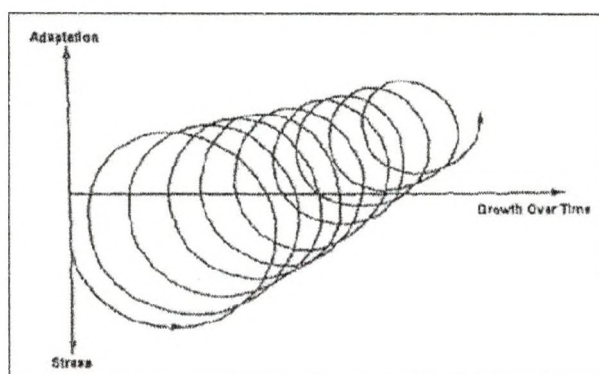
### Theoretical Frameworks

There have been different theories and models developed to explain the process of cultural adaptation and re-adaptation. However, there is a definite lack of a common theoretical framework and also a standardized method of research emphasized by several researchers (Cox, 2004; Ward, Bochner, & Fuhrman, 2001). By reviewing various theoretical approaches, the present literature review will examine various models and theories on adaptation and readaptation, communication, and cultural identity that could assist in explaining the reentry experiences. They are the following: intercultural transformation theory, cross-cultural adaptation theory, U-curve and the W-curve models, cultural identity model of repatriation, and coordinated management of meanings theory. Relevance of each of these theories for the current study will be explained at the end of each theory presentation.

#### *Intercultural transformation theory*

This theory proposed by Kim and Ruben (1988) seeks to explain the growth process of a sojourner during adaptation to a foreign culture. Kim (2001) addresses this

process in the form of a model that presents three parameters: stress, adaptation, and growth in a dynamic movement. This movement usually happens in a generally forward and upward direction to increase chances to successfully meet the demands of the host environment. This dynamic movement is not experienced in a smooth, steady and linear progression but in a dialectic, cyclic and continual “draw-back-to-leap” pattern. The “spiral” model (see Figure 1) explains that humans, being open systems, have the natural tendency to resist against any evolution that accompanies the destruction of the old structure. This resistance causes stress because the incoming messages from the host environment do not fit the expectations of sojourners and their equilibrium is disturbed. To deal with stress, the individual has to take adaptive measures to deal with disequilibrium and learn new habits, new ways of thinking and living. What follows the dynamic stress-adaptation disequilibrium, according to the theory, is a subtle growth.



*Figure 1. Diminishing Stress – Adaptation – Growth Fluctuation over Time (Kim 2001, p. 57)*

This theory was developed to explain sojourners’ adaptation to a host country. However, it can be also helpful in understanding the readaptation process because sojourners seem to go through the same phases of stress, adaptation, and growth during reentry.



### *Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory*

The theory developed by Kim (2001) concentrates on the dynamic interplay of the person and the environment. Cross-cultural adaptation is defined as “the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to a new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environment, establish (or reestablish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments” (p. 31). In this view, adaptation is the individual’s goal to “fit” the environment to achieve social efficacy.

This happens through the development of three facets of cultural adaptation (Kim, 2001, p. 48), such as communication competence, functional fitness and cultural identity. *Communication competence* is the ability of individuals to organize their activities with the activities of others. When a person develops understanding and coordination of communication symbols and meanings, he or she is perceived by others as a socially stable and healthy personality. *Functional fitness* and *psychological health* depend on successful development of understanding and coordination of communication symbols and meanings of a certain cultural group. Through effective communication, cultural “programs” reflect on the individual’s nervous system and make it stable. *Cultural identity* helps people to develop selfhood, a sense of belonging to a certain cultural group, their view on reality and themselves.

When a person enters a new cultural environment, the scripts that were learned in the home culture do not usually work there, and a person starts a new journey of unlearning the old ways of doing and thinking and learns new ones. This process is known as *deculturation* when a person becomes aware of the previously taken-for-granted mental and behavioral patterns imprinted by the home culture, “loses” some of



them and acquires new ones. For example, many Chinese students find that the longer they stay in the U.S., the more difficult it becomes for them to speak Chinese without making grammar mistakes and mixing words (Fong & Chuang, 2004). Being forced to lose old cultural patterns to adapt to a new environment, sojourners learn new ways of thinking and behaving. This process is known as *acculturation*, the acquisition of the elements and cultural patterns of a new host culture, particularly relevant to daily practices – from attire and food habits to behavioral norms and cultural values. Going through acculturation and deculturation, newcomers undergo various transformations and might reach the highest degree of acculturation, known as *assimilation* (see Figure 2).

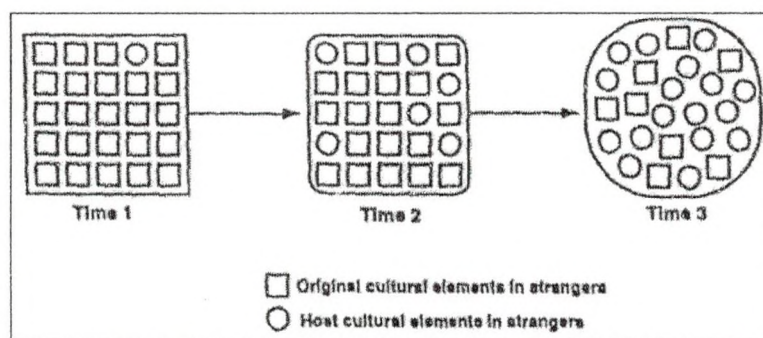
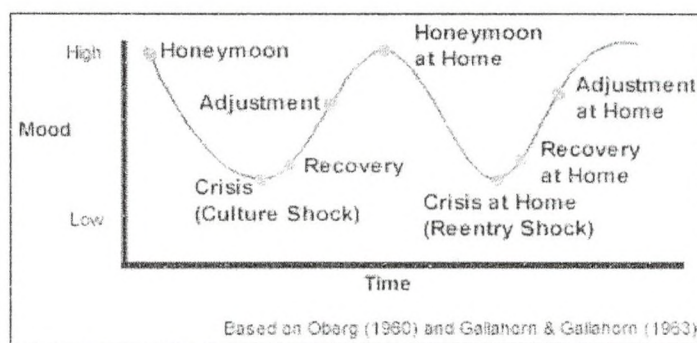


Figure 2. Deculturation and Acculturation over Time (Kim, 2001, p. 54).

This theory is designed to explain the process of cultural adaptation by looking at it through the combination of such factors as communication, fitness, and cultural identity. However, it is necessary to further explore the factors that influence cultural reentry and build on the existing theoretical framework.

### *The U-Curve and the W-Curve Models*

These models look at adaptation and re-adaptation of sojourners as one whole process. The model of U-curve was developed by Lysgaard (1955) and the W-curve model, an extension of the previous model, was developed by Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963). These researchers sought to understand how processes of adaptation and re-adaptation influence an individual. The first “U” curve happens when a person enters a foreign culture. The first phase is described as a “honeymoon” where the person enjoys everything around him or her. The second phase is characterized by the drop in excitement, feelings of alienation and irritation, and is known as “crisis.” The third phase is known as “recovery,” where the person resolves the crisis and is actively involved in culture learning. The last phase, “adjustment,” happens when the individual learns more about the foreign culture, starts to understand the culture better and communicates better with cultural members. All those phases, their length and depth, depend on the individual capabilities of the person. The second “U” curve happens when a person returns to his or her country and experiences the same four phases in his own country (see Figure 3).



*Figure 3. The W-curve of Intercultural Sojourning (Hart, 1999).*

Even though this model is widely used in the field, it recently started to be challenged. For instance, Church (1982) expressed his attitude for the model as “weak, inconclusive and over-generalized” (p. 542). Black & Mendenhall (1991) also argued that the model lacks methodological rigor and over-generalizes the results of many studies where it was used. This model does not significantly distinguish between adaptation and readaptation processes and does not explain why and how the readaptation happens. However, this process is still used, mostly because of its illustrative power, as pointed out by Onwumechili, Nwosu, Jackson II, and James-Hughes (2003).

#### *A Cultural Identity Model of Repatriation*

Sussman (2000) proposed a broad and integrated theory that explores the relationship between cultural identity and repatriation experience. He hypothesizes that the reentry experience can be predicted by the intersection of three variables: two psychological constructs (cultural adaptation and identity change) and one situational variable (cross-cultural differences in tolerance for cultural identity variability). Sussman (2000) summarizes that the Cultural Identity Model (CIM) proposes several tenets:

- (1) cultural identity is a critical but latent aspect of self-concept;
- (2) salience of cultural identity is, to a large part, a consequence of the commencement of a cultural transition;
- (3) cultural identity is dynamic and can shift as a consequence of the overseas transition and self-concept disturbances; and
- (4) shifts in cultural identity serve as a mediator between cultural adaptation and the repatriation experience.



The cultural identity model also suggests four types of post-adaptation identity: affirmative, subtractive, additive, and global, each with a resulting repatriation outcome.

In one study Sussman (2002) tested his model on 113 American teachers who sojourned to Japan, and she investigated two elements of the model: (1) the relationship between overseas adaptation and repatriation, and (2) the role of cultural identity strength in relation to the repatriation experience. Such dimensions of overseas cultural adaptation, transitional changes, and repatriation preparedness were measured as well as assessments of cultural identity strength and repatriation distress. Unexpected findings indicated that overseas adaptation and repatriation experiences are not directly connected. Rather, home culture identity strength inversely predicted repatriation distress with repatriates experiencing high distress if reporting weak cultural identity. Another finding indicated that repatriation experience is related to shifts in cultural identity. Thus, this investigation indicates that the reentry experience needs to be explained through a variation of relationships between variables, and this model needs to be further tested on various populations and with various variables.

#### *Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM)*

Several studies have been conducted to apply CMM theory in intercultural context. This communication theory, developed by Pearce & Cronen (1980), suggests that people create different social realities through communication. They interpret and act on the basis of rules that allow them to coordinate their meanings when interacting with others (Cronen, Pearce, & Harris, 1982). There are two types of rules: *constitutive* rules help people understand or interpret an event or message in a specific context; *regulative* rules of action suggest how to act in a specific situation. When constitutive and regulative

rules are understood and coordinated, interactions tend to run smoothly and comfortably. Misunderstandings can often result in actions that would be appropriate in one social reality and inappropriate in another. When this theory is applied to a cultural context, it explains how different cultural groups have distinct cultural patterns of communication and behavior that can lead to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and conflicts (e.g., Pearce & Cronen, 1980; Pearce, 2005). For example, one of the studies sought to understand intercultural communication between first generation immigrants from India and Euro-Americans (Driskill, 1995). Another study sought to interpret the experiences of three Malay women sojourners by utilizing the theoretical framework of CMM (Pawanteh, 1996).

CMM theory is helpful for understanding communication problems during sojourners' adaptation to a new environment where misinterpretations and misunderstandings are natural due to different social realities. However, it can also assist in understanding the communication problems that returnees might experience during their reentry. Accordingly, problems in communication can happen because sojourners develop new meanings in a host culture that can be misunderstood or misinterpreted by the home culture members.

### Summary

This literature review concentrated on two important topics: 1) culture and cultural identity and 2) cross-cultural experiences of living in a foreign culture and returning to a home culture. Culture and cultural identity explored the formation of cultural identity and its transformations through cultural experiences. The specifics of

cross-cultural experiences were reviewed by presenting various studies of cultural adaptation and readaptation followed by the overview of the theoretical frameworks.

It was noticed that most of the previous research concentrated on developing theoretical explanations for the process of adaptation to a foreign culture. Much less has been done to develop theoretical explanations for the process of readaptation to a home culture. Also, a limited number of research studies were conducted to understand how changes in cultural identity and communication contribute to this process. Thus, this study will seek to contribute to the existing research by exploring these two factors in the context of reentry process and will also examine their interconnectedness. The next chapter will concentrate on the construction of this study and the methods used to explore the previously mentioned interconnectedness.



## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

This research explores the reentry process of U.S. students who went abroad for a semester or two between 2003 and 2007 through study abroad programs offered by the University of North Dakota (UND). Through personal conversations with UND's education abroad advisors, the researcher found out that there is a need to learn about how UND students go through the reentry process, what problems they experience, and what can be done to assess their needs. The only opportunity that was available for UND students after they came back home was to join a group, Student Leaders, student ambassadors who studied abroad in the past.

This research was conducted to assist the study abroad educators at UND in developing an understanding of the students' reentry process and to provide recommendations to make the students' reentry experiences more successful. The present chapter includes a description of the research design, research population, data collection, data analysis, and a summary.

#### Research Design

I conducted a qualitative study to understand in depth the reentry process of UND students and the factors that contribute to this process. The organization of the study was based on the grounded theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), a qualitative research methodology that generates a theory through the process of

conducting the research and collecting data. By using grounded theory “one does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). Charmaz (1983) observed that grounded theorists “check and fill out emerging ideas by collecting further data” that strengthens the quality of the data and the ideas developed from it (p. 110).

While conducting the study, I did not choose a theory to understand the reentry experiences of UND students, but had an idea that was born in a concrete situation and was grounded in experience. I studied in the United States for a year as an exchange student. After returning to Ukraine, I realized that I had changed, had developed new perspectives on the world, had improved various skills, and I had learned much about myself. However, when I came back to Ukraine, to the country in which I thought I knew what to expect, I realized that I did not “fit in” anymore. I experienced deep discomfort for about a month while talking to my relatives and old friends, missed the United States and my new friends, and viewed my native culture as foreign. After adjusting in some ways, but not completely, to my old routine, I started to look for opportunities to come back to the United States, where I would be able to continue my education.

However, I developed a new interest that was connected with international experiences, and I realized that the idea of crossing borders intrigued me. To choose an appropriate research topic for my thesis, I decided to talk to the education abroad advisors at the University of North Dakota where I have been studying all this time. During informal conversations, I learned that one of the needs is to understand how to make reentry experiences easier for UND students. I decided to conduct a case study to

understand the reentry experiences of UND students for several reasons. First, I had a hard time adjusting to my home country after studying abroad, and I was able to understand what other students might experience during reentry. Second, by spending six years in the United States as a student at UND, I was able to relate to the specificities and the culture of this university. Third, I wanted to conduct a study to help others by making their intercultural experiences more effective while also enriching my understanding of the subject.

I chose two research methods to enhance the validity of the findings. Qualitative interviews, according to Kvale (1996), are employed “to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples’ experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations.” Interviewing was selected as a methodology in this study for several reasons: to provide the participants with the opportunity of describing what is meaningful and important to them; to allow the researcher to explore unexpected ideas; and to formulate questions for the survey. An electronic survey was chosen as a method in this study to reach a large population over a small period of time (Wright, 2005); to reach a population that might not have talked about reentry in any other way (Garton, Haythornthwaite, & Wellman, 1999); and 3) to gain additional perspectives to those obtained through interviews.

Before conducting interviews and the survey, I completed the required Institutional Review Board training, and received the necessary approvals for human subject research projects. The participation in this research study was voluntary, and the students did not receive any incentives. I used a tape-recorder during interviews and did concise transcriptions of the recordings after the interviews. Before each interview, I



explained the purpose of the study, and I asked students to sign a consent form.

SurveyMonkey.com, computer software available online, was utilized to create the web-based survey questionnaire to ensure a professional look and an ease in completing by respondent. This website also provided visual representation of results from close-ended questions, and gave me the possibility to download the results in various electronic formats.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, with the researcher having an outline of topics and issues to be discussed in a conversational and informal tone. According to Patton (1990), the major advantage of this approach is that the data gathered is more systematic and comprehensive than in unstructured interviews. The format of the survey was a combination of close-ended and open-ended questions to collect a variety of insights. According to Foddy (1993), close-ended questions limit the respondent to the set of alternatives being offered, while open-ended questions allow the respondent to express an opinion without being influenced by the researcher (p. 127).

### Research Population

The population studied consisted of U.S. students who went abroad for a semester or two between the Fall 2003 and Spring 2007 semesters through University of North Dakota study abroad programs. The researcher chose this population due to its accessibility and uniqueness.

It was easy to access this population because study abroad advisors were willing to assist in the study and to become a link between the researcher and the research population. Study abroad advisors showed an interest in this topic because they wanted to increase their understanding of cultural reentry, improve the services they provide to

UND students, and assess the needs of their students during reentry. It was also easy to access this population because I am currently a student at the University of North Dakota, know the campus well, and can access convenient places to meet with students.

The unique features of the group of students researched are connected with the state of the U.S. culture in general and North Dakota culture in particular. The distinctive features of U.S. culture mentioned by Nussbaum (2005) include emphasis on individualism, importance of time, value of work and money, orientation toward future and change, and focus on progress. In addition to these distinctive features, there is one more that makes U.S. students interesting to study. The United States education system does not emphasize the knowledge of geography, world cultures, religions, and languages to the same extent as some other education systems around the world. According to a Committee for Economic Development (CED) report, *Education for Global Leadership: The Importance of International Studies and Foreign Language Education for U.S. Economic and National Security* (2006), only about one-third of seventh to twelfth grade students in the U.S. learn a foreign language, and state high-school graduation requirements often include only minimal coursework in international and cultural studies. At the post-secondary level, fewer than 10 percent of college students enroll in a foreign language class, and only one percent of undergraduates study abroad. Moreover, the state of North Dakota lacks diversity. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population in the state in 2006 consisted of 91.9 percent white people. Thus, by living in such a homogeneous state, most students lack an understanding of diversity and cross-cultural issues. This makes the cultural adaptation and reentry experiences of students who go to the University of North Dakota rather distinct to research.



I divided this population into two groups. The first group consisted of Student Leaders, UND education abroad ambassadors who had studied abroad in the past. These students helped education abroad advisors during the pre-departure orientations that prepared students to go abroad, participated in recruitment presentations about study abroad programs on the UND campus, and met once a month to discuss their progress as a group. Student Leaders were valuable for this research because they have already gone through the reentry process, were eager to share their experiences and knowledge, and were using their study abroad experience to benefit others. The second group consisted of UND students, Student Leaders as well as other students, who studied abroad any time between the Fall 2003 and Spring 2007 semesters. Besides learning about Student Leaders' experiences, I wanted to reach students who did not join this group of students for various reasons and who dealt with reentry on their own. In addition, I wanted to gain more perspectives on various factors influencing reentry that arose from the interviews.

I visited several Student Leaders' meetings, told those students about the study, and asked for volunteers who would give an interview about their study abroad experiences. Out of 17 Student Leaders, I was able to interview 13 that included 10 females and three males. Of these, five went abroad in 2005, five studied in another country in 2006, and three studied abroad in 2007. Twelve of them studied abroad for a full semester and one studied abroad for 5 weeks in a summer. They studied in such countries as Spain (4), England (3), Norway (3), Greece (2), and Australia (1). The second group who were to be surveyed consisted of Student Leaders (22) and other UND students (45 students), and included 53 females and 14 males. Two of them studied for 4-6 weeks, 10 for one year, and 55 for a semester. They studied in such countries as Spain,



Australia, Norway, New Zealand, France, United Kingdom, China, Japan, Greece, Germany, Mexico, and Puerto Rico. Out of 67 surveyed students, 21 had never been to another country prior to their study abroad. For the 46 people who had been to another country previous to studying abroad, the longest trip lasted from several days to one month.

## Data Collection Methods and Procedures

### *The Interviews*

I was able to interview 13 Student Leaders who agreed to participate after the researcher had talked to them during one of their monthly meetings in the spring of 2006. The interviews took place during the spring and fall semesters of 2006. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes to one hour, and the researcher was able to collect valuable information and to gain a good perspective on the reentry experiences of the interviewees. The interview questions were divided into five categories: demographics, preparation for study abroad, adaptation to foreign culture, reentry experiences, and ability and willingness to use the new knowledge and gained experience. Most of the questions were modeled after questions from previous research studies discussed in the literature review of this thesis.

The questions on the students' demographics included age, gender, place of origin, country and year of study abroad, previous traveling experience, and number of U.S. students that went to the same place at the same time. The questions on the students' preparation for study abroad included knowledge of the foreign culture and language, reasons for going abroad, concerns about going abroad, and quality of UND pre-departure orientation. The questions on the students' adaptation to foreign culture

included differences and similarities between the U.S. and the foreign culture, opportunities and challenges for adaptation to the new culture, skills developed while adapting to the new culture, time spent with other U.S. students, and stereotypes foreigners had of United States citizens. The questions on the students' reentry experiences included feelings and experiences during reentry and solutions identified for dealing with any discomfort after reentry. The questions on students' willingness and ability to use the new knowledge and skills acquired in another country included plans for the future, desire to travel abroad again, reasons for opting to join the Student Leaders group, and thoughts on developing a reentry program for future study abroad programs (see Appendix A for the complete set of interview questions).

### *The Survey*

A survey that was designed after all conducted interviews reflected the perspectives gained from the interviewees. The survey was available online for two months for students to fill out, in the Fall semester of 2007. I sent three e-mails through the education abroad advisor to remind students about the survey. There were 82 respondents to the survey out of 300 students to whom the invitation was sent. However, out of these 82 people, only 67 were able to get access to all the sections of the survey due to some technical complications on the first day it became available. Thus, the answers of only 67 (22% of 300 possible participants) participants who had access to the whole survey were used in the data analysis.

The survey questions concentrated on the same topics as the interviews, but expanded on the questions that would test changes in cultural identity. The first section titled "General Information" categorized students' demographic information (age, gender,



country and year of study abroad, travelling experience previous to study abroad, and length of latest trip to another country before studying abroad, if applicable), and on students' preparation to study abroad (evaluation of the UND pre-departure orientation and of students' knowledge of a foreign culture and a foreign language before they went abroad). The second section, named "While Abroad," centered on students' adaptation to a foreign culture. These questions were formulated following insights gained during the interviews. Some questions asked students to compare the two cultures and to evaluate the frequency of communication with relatives and friends at home. The third section, entitled "Back to U.S.A.," solicited students' feelings when they returned home, their explanations of those feelings, the length of discomfort if they experienced any, and the communication experiences with relatives and friends. The forth section, named "Reflections on Your Experiences," questioned students on whether they visited the Coming Back Party at the UND International Center and the reasons why they did or did not, how they intended to use their new experience, and what suggestions they had for future study abroad students coming back. The last section, entitled "Understanding Culture," had questions on what culture meant to students, what they learned about the foreign country they had visited, how they looked at the U.S. when they came back, and their new perspectives of the world. This section was skipped by around one-fourth of the participants probably because it was the last one and they got tired of answering.

The survey had many open-ended questions where students could write their unique insights on the issues (see Appendix B for complete set of survey questions).



## Instruments for Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using various principles of the grounded theory method. I went through various stages of reading data, finding common themes, rereading data, revising the literature, and dividing themes into categories. The following is the detailed description of the stages undergone to develop the instruments for data analysis.

### *The First Stage*

When the data from the interviews were collected and transcribed, I read it several times to generate an analytic description or to develop the conceptual understanding of *what*, *how* and *why* research questions and respondents' answers connected to reentry experiences of UND students (Warren & Karner, 2005, p.190).

After completing the initial coding and identifying various emerging patterns, I found the following subthemes that provided a cohesive representation of data connected with reentry: "positive reentry experience," "negative reentry experience," "mixed reentry experience," "communication with parents," "communication with friends," "perceptions of U.S. culture," and "coping with reentry discomfort." Next, I grouped these subthemes into broader themes of "feelings," referring to students' emotions about reentry, "communication," referring to students' challenges of connecting back home after reentry, and "reentry strategies," referring to students' actions regarding reentry. The theme on feelings included answers to the following interview questions:

- (1) Were you excited or not to come back to the U.S.?
- (2) Was it hard or not to come back to the U.S.?
- (3) Did you experience any discomfort when you came back home?

The theme on communication concentrated on connections with relatives and friends, and included the following questions:

- (1) Was it hard or easy to talk to your relatives about study abroad?
- (2) Was it hard or easy to talk to your friends about your experience abroad?

The theme on reentry strategies included answers on such questions as

- (1) What did you do to escape discomfort?
- (2) Do you think it is necessary to prepare future students who will go abroad about the re-entry process?
- (3) What suggestions do you have for such preparation?
- (4) What advice can you give on how to deal with re-entry shock?
- (5) Do you think there is a need to develop a Re-Entry Orientation?

Besides these three themes, there was one more theme emerging, “students’ perceptions of the home culture,” which was undeveloped but intriguing to explore. There was only one question that addressed this issue: What did you think about the U.S. culture when you came back home? Thus, I added more questions on the survey to collect more data, in accordance with the grounded theory method described above.

### *The Second Stage*

I collected the data from the electronic survey to check “developing ideas with further specific observation” (Charmaz, 1983, p. 110), and I identified emerging themes. They matched the themes identified for the interviews, plus a developed theme “perceptions of the home culture,” and a new theme, “perceptions of the world.” The theme on feelings included the following questions:

- (1) How did you feel about your study abroad experience during the first month after you came back home to the U.S.?

Students could choose everything that applied to them from the following categories of feelings: excited, happy, relieved, bored, depressed, confused, alienated, or other (where students could write their answer).

- (2) Did you experience any re-entry discomfort as a result of your study abroad experience after coming back home?
- (3) If yes, why do you think it happened? If yes, how long did it last?

The theme on communication included items for which students had to agree or disagree with the following statements:

- (1) It was hard to communicate what I learned and experienced abroad to my family members.
- (2) It was hard to communicate what I learned and experienced abroad to my friends.

The theme on reentry strategies included such questions as

- (1) How did you deal with discomfort?
- (2) Please, share your advice on how to deal with re-entry with new students who will study abroad in the future.
- (3) Do you think it is necessary to design a Re-Entry Orientation for students who just came back from studying abroad to help them re-adjust to their own culture?

The theme on perceptions of the home culture included the following questions:

- (1) After studying abroad, did you or didn't you become more critical of U.S. values, style of life, political system, social system, education?



- (2) After studying abroad, did you or didn't you become more appreciative of U.S. values, lifestyle, political system, social system, education?
- (3) What did you learn about your culture when you came back from studying abroad?

The theme on perceptions of the world included the following questions:

- (1) Did your perception of the world change after studying abroad?
- (2) If yes, in what way did your perception of the world change?

### *The Third Stage*

After major themes were identified, I consulted the literature to compare my themes with those present in previous studies accomplished by various scholars. In agreement with the perspective of the grounded theory method, a researcher uses literature as "a source of questions and comparisons rather than a measure of truth" (Charmaz, 1983, p. 117). After reviewing the collected data one more time, as well as the emerging subthemes and themes, and the themes coming out of the existing literature, I divided my collected data into four categories: "reentry feelings" that approached reentry feelings, "changes in cultural identity" focusing on transformations in self connected with reentry, "reentry communication problems" that approached challenges to relationships related to reentry, and "reentry strategies" concentrating on actions of students connected with reentry. Then, I formulated four general questions that served as the main instruments for data analysis:

- (1) What did UND students feel when returning to the United States after studying abroad?

- (2) What communication problems did UND students have when coming back to the United States after studying abroad?
- (3) What transformations did UND students undergo in their cultural identities after studying abroad?
- (4) What strategies did UND students utilize during cultural reentry?

Then, I matched the questions from the interviews and the survey to connect to the above questions, interpreted the connections between them, and collected the explanations for understanding reentry experiences of UND students.

### Summary

In this chapter, I explained that this study was conducted to understand the reentry experienced of U.S. students at the University of North Dakota. Two methods, interviewing and surveying, were used to ensure the credibility of the data. Grounded theory helped to explain the qualitative nature of this study and the choice of the methods. I also reviewed the specific research questions that evolved from data collection and analysis. The next chapter will present the results collected during the study.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This chapter is dedicated to describing the results collected from the interviews and the survey that were used to explore UND students' experiences after they returned to the U.S. and to assess the factors that contributed to their experiences. The results of the interviews are presented first because this method was the initial one utilized in this study and it assisted in formulating the questions for the survey.

The results are divided into four parts that reflect the four questions that served as the main instruments for data analysis. The first part, *Reentry Feeling*, presents the results connected with the question: "What did UND students feel when returning to the United States after studying abroad?" The second part, *Reentry Communication Problems*, delineates the results connected with the question: "What communication problems did UND students have when coming back to the United States after studying abroad?" The third part, *Changes in Cultural Identity*, illustrates the results linked with the question: "What transformations did UND students undergo in their cultural identities after studying abroad?" The fourth part, *Reentry Strategies*, details the results linked with the question: "What strategies did UND students use during cultural reentry?" The summary of the results is presented at the end of the chapter.



## Reentry Feelings

This section presents the results connected with the feelings UND students experienced during reentry. It gives the description, duration and reasons for these feelings reported by the students.

### *The Interviews*

#### *Bitter-Sweet Feelings*

One interview question in the “Reentry” section asked whether students were excited to come back to the United States. Out of 13 interviewees, two said that they were excited, eight had mixed feelings, and three were not excited. Students who said they were excited reported feeling happy to meet their families and friends which they had not seen for several months. Students who said they were not excited reported feeling sad because they had become attached to the people abroad and did not want to end their exciting experience. One female student who went to England for a semester acknowledged that she “cried almost all the flight home.”

However, the majority of students affirmed that they had mixed feelings because they wanted to see their families and friends, but they missed the new lifestyle and the new friends they had experienced abroad. A female student who went to Spain for a semester observed, “I was excited to see my family and my friends, but I really did not want to come home because I was having such a good time and I really liked the country I lived in.” Several people described reentry feelings as “bitter-sweet.” A female student who went to Australia for a semester explained: “It was bitter-sweet because I was done with school and was biding my time waiting to go home and see everyone at home. But at the same time, it was kind of the ending to the greatest thing ever.”

Another question in the “Reentry” section asked if it was hard or not to come back to the United States. Out of 13 interviewees, five said that it was hard, six said that it was both hard and easy, and two said that it was easy. Those who said it was hard to come home explained that they had to leave their newly acquired lifestyle and new friends, “to let go the experience,” and to lose the freedom of doing what they wanted. These students also affirmed that they felt they no longer would be able to travel to new and exciting places, and they no longer be understood by their old friends in the U.S. Those who said it was as easy to come home explained that they were excited to see their families and friends, to be able to have a car, to feel comfortable in the culture they knew, and to be able to understand the language more easily. A female student who went to England for a semester observed: “It was easy right away because I was so excited to see my friends, so excited to have a car, so excited to be with my family, that easiness coming back to the comfort....”

The hardest experiences reported by the interviewees were to leave their new lifestyles and new friends, to get accustomed to their old routine, and to communicate with people who could not relate to their new experience. A male student who went for a semester to Greece commented: “The hard part was leaving the people that I have met in Greece and leaving my four-month vacation.” A female student who went for a semester to England gave the following description to her feelings:

The hardest part was that I had to go back to working. I had to go back to actually focusing on school more than I did over there. I could not just hop on the plane whenever I wanted to and travel. I did not have that freedom that I did when I studied abroad.

## *Discomfort*

Another question from the same section concentrated on whether the students experienced any discomfort when they came back home or not. Out of 13 interviewees, two said that they did not experience any discomfort in adjusting to life back home except for minor distress related to not being able to go to new places every week and not eating foreign food. 11 students agreed to having some kind of discomfort, such as feeling “annoyed” with relatives, friends and the surrounding environment, and feeling “sad” due to inability to see their new friends that they made abroad. They pointed out that they did not feel comfortable catching up with people, restarting college life, getting used to the old routine, and communicating with old friends. The following comment describes the experiences mentioned by many students: “The biggest one was that I had all that interesting experience that nobody cared about.” The amount of and the reasons for discomfort varied from student to student.

One person who studied in Spain talked about experiencing different types of discomfort while being with her own family during the summer vacation:

I got annoyed with my parents a lot because I went home right away and I had to live in my house. And I just wanted it to be like Spain. I was annoyed that I had to get into my car and drive somewhere I normally could have walked. I was annoyed that it was not that warm.

Another person who also studied in Spain spoke about feeling uncomfortable when returning to school in the fall:

I was more uncomfortable when I came back to UND in the fall, and it was like I had to just jump in with my friends, and I had missed the six months of their life



so it was hard to know the inside jokes that they had or just different stuff they were talking about.

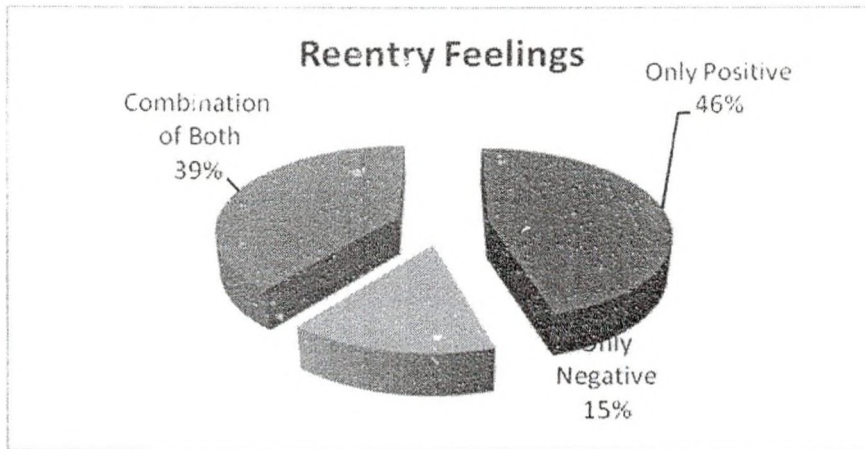
Several students observed reentry shock being much more considerable than their cultural adaptation in a foreign country. A male who went to Greece observed:

I definitely experience much more culture shock here than there. There I was just excited. The hardest thing for me was day-to-day routine. There, everything was new. Every weekend we would travel or experience something new. Here, everything is the same thing over and over again. I want something new. I am ready for change.

### *The Survey*

#### *Bitter-Sweet Feelings*

One survey question from the section “Back to U.S.A.” asked how students felt about their study abroad during the first month after they returned to the United States. Students could choose out of several categories that applied to them (excited, happy, relieved, bored, depressed, confused, and alienated) or give their own explanation under the category of “other.” The answers were the following: excited (44), happy (40) relieved (10), bored (11), depressed (15), confused (11), alienated (13), and other (20). Out of 66 people who answered this question, 30 talked only about positive experiences (excited, happy, or relieved), 10 people talked about negative experience (bored, confused, or alienated), and 26 said that they had both experiences (see Figure 4).



*Figure 4. Reentry Feelings Reported by the Survey Participants.*

Out of 20 students who chose the answer “other,” 18 mentioned negative experiences and two positive ones. Negative comments concentrated on feeling sad, lost or frustrated. Some indicated that they missed their new foreign friends and the experience of being abroad; some could not relate to their experiences with their old friends in the U.S. Several respondents noticed that it was hard to adjust to U.S. ways of life, especially to “a rural, homogeneous culture, such as Grand Forks.” Positive feelings that were mentioned included feeling proud and mature.

#### *Discomfort*

There were three survey questions that were connected with reentry discomfort. One of them from the section “Back to U.S.A.” asked if students experienced any reentry discomfort as a result of their study abroad experience after coming back home. Out of 66 students who answered this question, 19 (29%) said that they did not experience any discomfort, and 47 (71%) said that they did (see Figure 5).

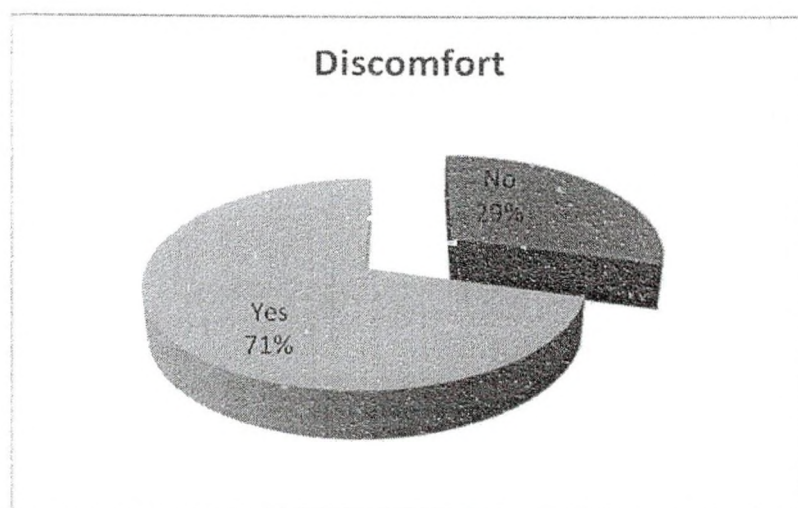


Figure 5. Reentry Discomfort Reported by the Survey Participants.

Another survey question from the section “Back to U.S.A.” asked students to explain why they experienced discomfort. Out of 50 students who answered this question, 29 indicated communication problems, 27 indicated personal changes, 28 indicated change in cultural identity by developing a new perspective on the world, seven did not know what to do with their new knowledge and skills, six did not experience any discomfort, and 14 students chose to write about their experiences under the category “other” (Table 1).

Table 1. Reasons for Reentry Discomfort Mentioned by the Survey Participants.

Survey Question: How did you deal with discomfort?	
Answer Options:	Response Count
It was hard to talk about my study abroad experience to people who have never been abroad.	29
It was hard because I changed and every one else in America stayed the same.	27



I looked at the world from a new perspective but did not know what to do with it.	28
I did not know how to apply my new knowledge and skills.	7
I did not experienced any discomfort.	6
Other (please specify)	14

Out of 14 students who have chosen the answer “other,” five mentioned that it was hard to communicate their experience, three said that they missed the lifestyle and friends of a foreign country, and three noticed that it was hard to adjust back to American culture. Three people noticed the positive transformations in themselves, such as changing for the better, enjoying time abroad, and getting support from family and friends during reentry.

Another survey question from the section “Back to U.S.A.” asked students how long they have experienced discomfort. Out of 46 people who answered this question, nine said that it lasted one month, nine said it lasted two months, eight said that it lasted three months, seven said it lasted between four to five months, 11 said that it lasted six months or longer, and nine chose the answer “other.”

Out of nine students who chose the answer “other,” five said that they were still experiencing discomfort; one reported to have experienced discomfort for a long while; one said two months; one said one month; and one reported to have experienced discomfort until the person left North Dakota. Out of these nine responses, seven used the answer “other” to expand on their responses, and two used “still experience it” without selecting any provided category (see Figure 6).

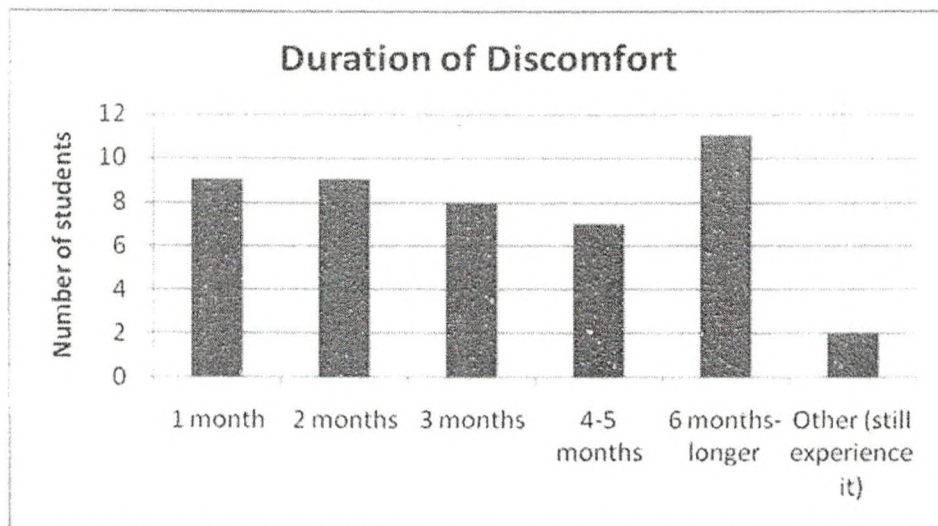


Figure 6. Duration of Reentry Discomfort Mentioned by the Survey Participants.

### Reentry Communication Problems

This section presents the results connected with communication of UND students with their relatives and friends. It illustrates what communication experiences were the most challenging and presents students' explanations for those experiences.

#### *The Interviews*

##### *Communication with Relatives*

One interview question from the section "Reentry" focused on students' communication with their relatives. Their answers were divided: three said that it was "hard," six said it was "easy," and four said it was "both."

Those who said it was "hard" explained that it was because their parents or relatives could not relate to their experiences, especially if they never travelled abroad. One person said that his relatives judged him for spending the money. A female student who went to Australia for a semester observed:

It's hard. They ask you how was it and what do you say? All I could say was 'it was amazing, it was wonderful.' But I think it does not even begin because if you

have not done something like that you can not relate to it. It is like when you are talking to someone, and you feel they are not listening.

Those who said it was “easy” explained that their relatives had also travelled to other countries, that while abroad they were in constant communication with their relatives over the phone or the Internet or that their relatives were very interested in the study abroad experience for various reasons. A female who studied in Norway said that it was easy to talk to her relatives on her mother’s side because they have Norwegian heritage.

Those students who said it was “both” hard and easy indicated that it was easy to talk to the relatives who have been abroad and hard to talk to those who have not because they could not relate to the students’ experience.

#### *Communication with Friends*

Another interview question from the section “Reentry” focused on students’ communication experiences with their friends. Out of 13 interviewees, 11 pointed out that it was hard or harder to communicate with friends than with relatives. Only two said that it was easy because one had friends who had studied abroad before, and another was able to communicate with friends frequently through e-mail or phone “at least once a week.”

People who noticed some challenges in communication observed that their friends “were not able to relate,” were not very interested because they had not travelled abroad, “did not care much,” and lost interest in study abroad stories very fast. Many respondents pointed out that it was hard to catch up with the changes in friends’ lives. A female who went for a semester to Greece observed: “It was harder. They appreciate that I went abroad and I had these new experiences. But I guess, you can not really understand



before you actually go abroad, how excited you get when Greece is mentioned.... It was hard.”

The Survey

Communication with Family and Friends

The seventh survey question from the section “Back to U.S.A.” explored if students had communication problems with family and friends after the study abroad experience. There were 66 responses to this question (one did not answer). The answers connected with communication problems with family were divided almost equally. Out of 31 students who agreed to having had communication problems with relatives, 11 strongly agreed and 20 agreed. Out of 26 students who disagreed, 21 disagreed and five strongly disagreed. Nine students indicated that they felt neutral about this topic. The answers connected with communication problems with friends indicated that more people had problems than those who did not. 42 agreed to have problems, 21 disagreed, and five were neutral. The comparison of the results indicated that students had more communication problems with friends than with parents (see Figure 7).

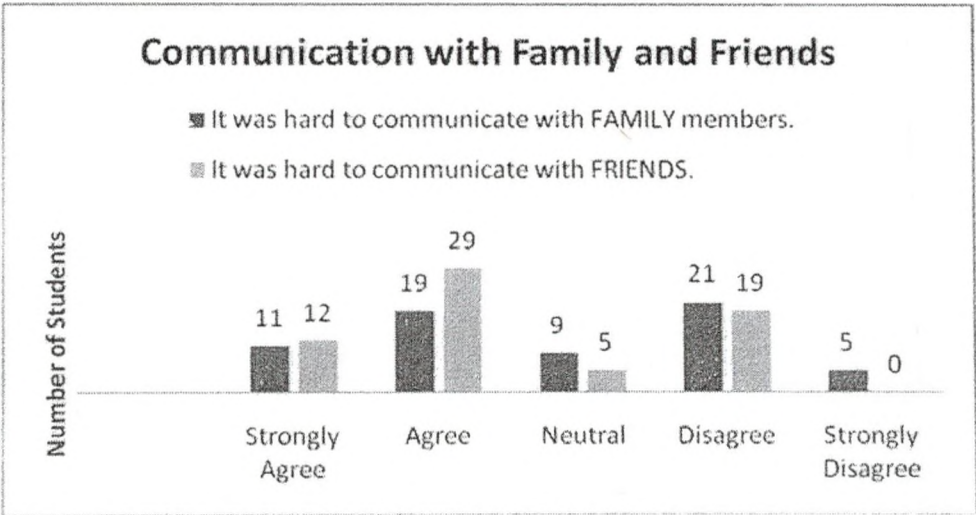


Figure 7. Communication Problems of the Survey Participants during Cultural Reentry.

## Changes in Cultural Identity

The following section presents the results connected with the transformations UND students have experienced in their cultural identities after returning to the U.S. culture. It presents the data collected from the interviews and the survey that illustrates positive and negative perceptions of UND students about their home culture and concludes with a comparison of these perceptions.

### *The Interviews*

#### *Reflections on the U.S. Culture*

One question from the section “Reentry” explored students’ thoughts about the U.S. culture when they came back home. In answering this question, students used the following phrases: “I understood,” “I realized,” “I became more aware,” and “I noticed,” that indicate the transformations they had undergone while abroad and after coming back. Students’ observations were connected with such categories as values and traditions, people and personal changes. Many students noticed that the pace of life in the United States is very fast in comparison with some other countries. Some of the students relearned to appreciate having a car; some of them, on the contrary, missed the benefits of developed public transportation systems they experienced in other countries, especially the European ones. One person compared the social system of Norway to the social system in the U.S. and noticed benefits as well as drawbacks for each. Many interviewees made observations about food, noticing that food in the United States is less healthy than in other countries and that people in the U.S. enjoy huge portions.

Students said that many people in the United States are “judgmental,” “not personal,” always “busy” with something, and not “taking a break to enjoy life.” Some

students stated that people in the U.S. are “closed-minded.” A female student who went to England asserted that “a lot of people are closed minded until they actually go out and experience something like that [study abroad].” One person contended that “Americans are very concerned with themselves” in comparison with people in other cultures. Several students said that, unlike Americans, people in other countries learn about other cultures, have access to foreign television and foreign products.

Students also reflected on their personal changes and realizations. A female student observed:

Before I went to Spain, I was such a planner. I need to do this and this, put every little activity into a day and busy all the time. After I came back, I was too much the over way.... I felt like I needed to change the way I live.

Another female who went to Spain and made good friends with students from Mexico observed that Mexicans are much closer to their families than people in the U.S. Before going abroad, this student felt that she was very close to her parents, but when she was abroad, she was stunned how close her Mexican friends were to their parents. A female student who went to England for a semester noticed that during that time abroad she learned a lot about English history and traditions. When she came home, she realized that that she did not know much about the U.S. culture in comparison with her new knowledge of the English culture. She concluded: “After visiting other cultures, seeing the monuments and famous places, and all the history, I realized that American does not really have any history.”



## The Survey

### *Reflections on the U.S. Culture*

One survey question from the section "Understanding Culture" focused on what students reported to have learned about their culture when they came back. Out of 30 responses, 15 reflected on the negative sides of U.S. culture, four mentioned positive learning, 10 observed specifics, one was not sure what she learned, and one did not write an answer. Thirty-seven students skipped this question. Besides being in the last section of the survey (around 20 people did not answer any questions from this section), it was an open-ended question and people could get tired of answering the questions.

Those who talked about the negative sides of U.S. culture and people mentioned the following: Americans "love convenience and one-stop-shops," "eat a lot of bad food," "are lazy," are "superficial about many things," are "wasters" in comparison to the rest of the world," "take a lot for granted," "do not put as much importance on spending time with people" as the rest of the world, are "blind to the rest of the world," lack tolerance towards foreigners, are "very ethnocentric," and are "ignorant of foreign cultures."

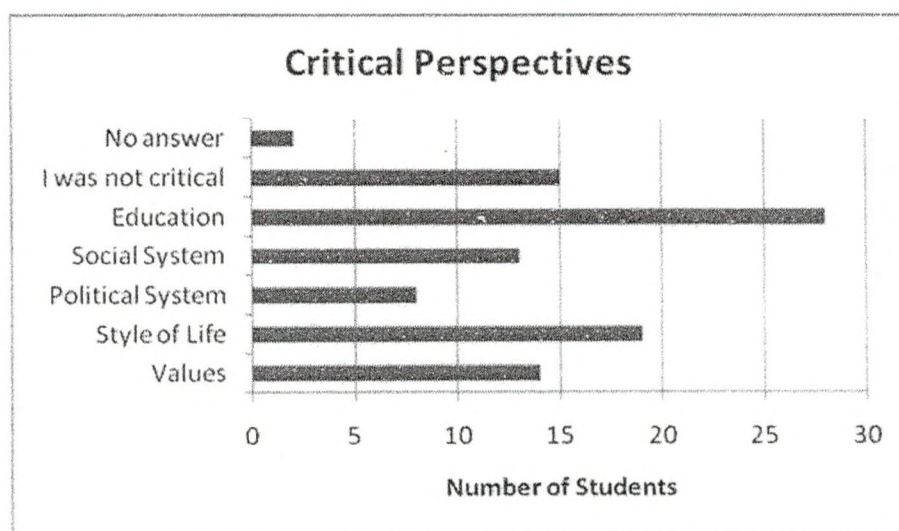
Out of four people who talked about positive learning experiences, one became "more appreciative" of the U.S. culture, one expanded her "sheltered views," one started to appreciate family traditions more, and one talked about different dimensions of culture. This latter student, a female who went to France for a semester and had never travelled abroad before, stated that she had an opportunity to reflect on the differences between the culture of North Dakota and the cultures of other states in the nation. She said: "I learned that my culture is more stoic and confident than others. I'm from small town ND, and I

learned that my culture is significantly different than other Americans (who came from South Carolina, Missouri, New Hampshire, etc.).”

Observed specifics included learning about “timing of life,” “American ways,” Americans being “different from the rest of the world,” and “differences in both cultures.” A female who went to Japan for a year commented: “I learned that I am most certainly American. My values are American, I behave like an American.”

### *Critical Perceptions of the U.S. Culture*

One survey question from the section “Back to U.S.A.” explored whether students had become more critical of U.S. values and lifestyles, the political system, the social system or education after studying abroad. Students were asked to explain their answers. Sixty five people answered this question using the given categories, 33 further explained in details their points of view, and two did not answer (see Figure 8).



*Figure 8. Critical Perspectives on the U.S. Culture Developed by the Survey Participants during Cultural Reentry.*

The explanations provided by students covered all the given categories. Some respondents stated that U.S. values are centered on career and monetary success, lacking attention to environmental and community issues, and emphasizing individualism and consumerism. Some described the U.S. culture as a "television culture" and a "self-centered culture." Some respondents affirmed that the U.S. lifestyle is "fast and furious," and that people in the U.S. "are expected to work before play." A female who went to New Zealand for a semester observed:

I realized how much we take for granted in this country, simply because we have the international "muscle" to get things cheap. We waste so much money, fuel, land, everything. Essentially, I became an environmentalist. I also got used to a completely relaxed lifestyle; it was difficult adjusting to feelings of tension over silly things, but for some reason I feel it anyway. It's amazing how much one's surroundings will affect one's attitude and demeanor.

Some respondents talked about the political system, mentioning that there are flaws in U.S. democratic processes, and that they had gained a new view from the outside perspective. Some talked about the social system, stating that U.S. society is capitalist and individualistic, and that it lacks a good public transportation system. Some respondents discussed education, mentioning that it is getting costlier and that it does not emphasize learning about other cultures and languages. A female who went to China for four weeks observed:

It was an eye opener to see how concerned other countries were with the entire world. This concept falls into all of the categories above in some way.

Americans seemed so much more self-centered in regard to the value system,

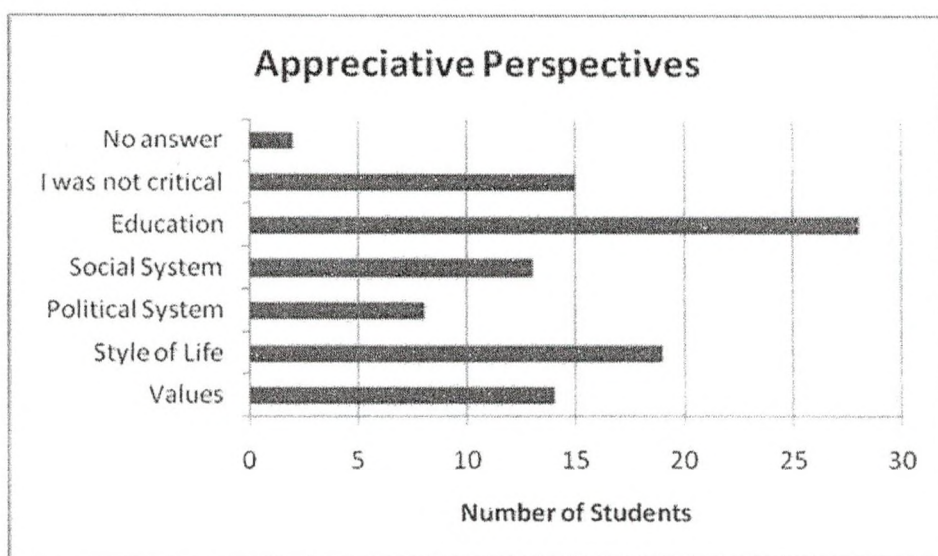


political system, lifestyle, social system, and especially education. Also, it made me aware of the different ways to approach education and I became surprised that we have such a cookie-cutter approach to all levels of schooling.

One person out of 33 respondents talked about becoming more appreciative of the freedoms that the U.S. offers.

### *Appreciative Perspective of the U.S. Culture*

Another survey question from the section “Back to U.S.A.” explored whether students become more appreciative of U.S. values, lifestyle, political system, social system, and education after their study abroad. Students were asked to explain their answers. Sixty-five people answered this question using the given categories, 28 delineated their points of view, and two did not answer (see Figure 9).



*Figure 9. Appreciative Perspectives on the U.S. Culture Developed by the Survey Participants during Cultural Reentry.*

The explanations provided by students covered all the given categories.

Respondents who talked about U.S. values mentioned individualism and drive for success

from the positive point of view; one person became proud of the U.S. “sense of goal-setting.” Those who discussed the U.S. lifestyle noticed that they started to appreciate the fast-pace and “how organized and efficient” people are.

Those who talked about the U.S. political system mentioned the structure of the government and the freedoms it provides as positive aspects of their home country. Respondents who discussed the U.S. social system observed its advantages, such as products that are cheaper and relationships that are friendlier as “you can smile or wave to someone and they return the favor.” A male who went to Greece for a semester observed: “The U.S. seems to have the best system with the most opportunities for anyone from any walk of life.” Those who talked about education mentioned that it is more structured and provides numerous opportunities. A female who studied in New Zealand for a semester observed:

Many people in this country are wasteful, but realizing it makes me feel more appreciative of what I have available to me here – not just material goods, but also the opportunity to be earning an education, especially as a woman, and even more especially in my fields (math and sciences). Not only that, but I was able to take a semester and travel to the other side of the world, and learn as much as I did. It wouldn’t be possible in many parts of the world.

### *Comparisons*

After comparing students’ answers (see Figure 10), it was found that most of the students (35) became more appreciative of some elements of their home culture and critical of others concomitantly. Also, there were more people who became only more critical (18) than only more appreciative (10).

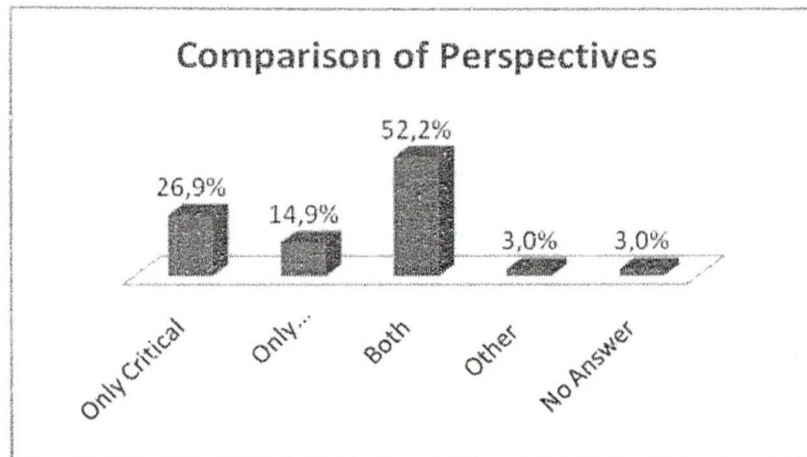


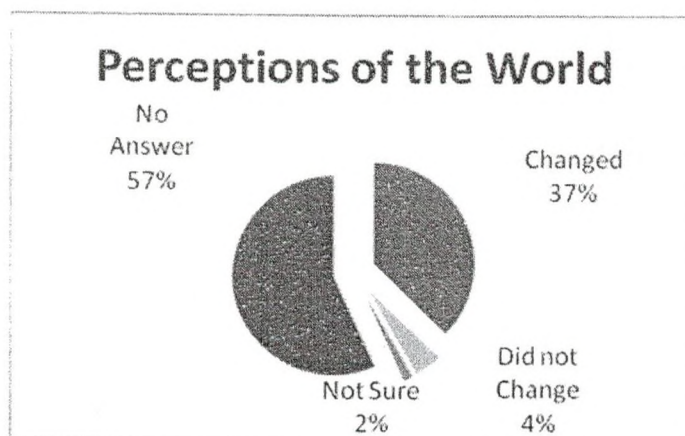
Figure 10. Comparison of Critical and Appreciative Perspectives Reported by the Survey Participants.

There were two other answers: one student who said that she came to the realization that people are people everywhere despite the differences, and another who said that he was not critical but did not indicate anything about appreciation. Two people did not answer.

#### *Perception of the World*

One question from the section "Understanding Culture" which sought to explore if students' perceptions of the world changed after studying abroad. Only 29 of 67 respondents, 23 (37%) said that their perceptions of the world changed, three (4%) said that their perceptions of the world did not change, and one (2%) was not sure (see Figure 11). Thirty-eight (57%) did not answer the question, presumably because it was in the last section of the survey "Understanding Culture" where one-fourth of participants skipped all the questions.





*Figure 11.* Perceptions on the World Developed by UND Students during Cultural Reentry.

The next survey question from the section “Understanding Culture” focused on exploring the reason students mentioned about the changes in their perception of the world. It was an open-ended question, and 24 people responded. Forty-three people skipped this question, presumably because it was in the last section of the survey “Understanding Culture” where one-fourth of participants did not answer any questions.

Those who answered reflected on their learning experience about the world, people, and cultures, using such phrases as words as “it broadened my mind,” “I became more open,” “I become more aware,” and “I become more understanding.” Almost all of the answers were positive, and some showed strong emotions. Several people pointed out that they realized that the world is small. One female who studied in Spain for a semester observed: “The world is a small place, and we are all connected. It also made me realize that people actually live in these places everyday, which was kind of a startling realization.” Several people made an observation that the U.S. became small to them after they saw other parts of the world. Another female who went to Spain for a semester noticed “that there is so much more out there and the U.S. seems so small.” Some talked

about their personal developments. Another person noticed: "I developed an appreciation for cultures different from my own and became more interested in understanding all cultures different from my own." Some people came to the realization that "people are just people." However, several students noticed "how different everything is" and "there are good and bad things about every culture."

### Reentry Strategies

This section presents the results collected from the interviews and the survey on the strategies that were developed by UND students during reentry and those they recommended for the education abroad advisors and future study abroad students.

#### *Incorporated Strategies*

Several interview questions concentrated on the strategies that UND students used to deal with various reentry challenges. One interview question from the section "Reentry" explored what students did to escape the discomfort. Out of 13 interviewees, 11 answered this question because they had previously acknowledged experiencing some kind of discomfort during reentry and two did not answer because they said that they did not experience it. Out of 11 people, two mentioned that they communicated a lot with the new friends they had made while studying abroad. One observed:

When I was just uncomfortable talking to my [old] friends about different things, the fun things, I would just usually call my friends that I studied abroad with and be like, "Oh, you remember this, when we did this?" They could relate to me because they were kind of going through the same thing.

Two respondents reported that they moved in with people they studied abroad with. Two respondents said that they started travelling in the United States to



“compensate for that longing to do something new and cool.” Several students said that they looked through pictures that they made during studying abroad. Some students said that they went to visit their new friends abroad.

Another interview question from the section “Now” that explored the suggestions students had for dealing with reentry showed that all 11 people who answered this question talked about the importance of communication during reentry. One noticed: “The more you talk about it, the easier it gets to pass it.”

### *Recommended Strategies*

Several questions from the interviews concentrated on the recommendations students have to make reentry easier for future study abroad students.

One interview question from the section “Now” sought to help in understanding if UND students felt the necessity to prepare future students about the re-entry process. All 13 interviewees agreed that it was “important” or “very important” to prepare future students to go abroad. However, the degree of suggested preparation differed among the respondents. They used such phrases as “it would be good,” “it would be helpful,” “it is important,” and “it is huge” at the beginning of their answer. Some said that it is “good to let them know” what they will experience, such as possible difficulties in communication with friends and family or reverse culture shock. One noticed that “it is much harder to come back if you had a very good experience abroad.” Many interviewees said that future students need to be prepared because “life will be different” from when they left and they need to know where they can go and talk about their study abroad experiences or what they can do to overcome reentry shock.



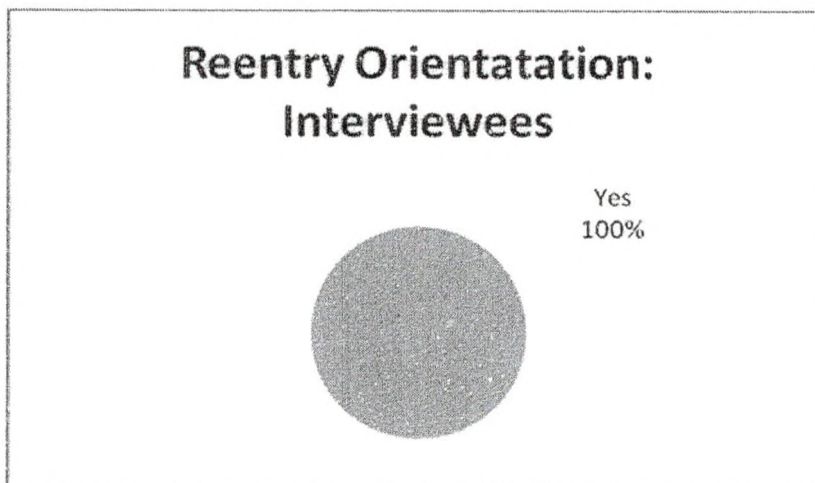
Several respondents pointed out that students need to be warned about “feeling weird,” that they would probably forget about many old issues and problems at home, and that it would be challenging to deal with old and new issues at the same time. Several wished they knew more about the reentry process when they came back.

The responses from another interview question from the section “Now” showed that the interviewees had several for the education abroad advisors. These ideas included the following: talking to students about reentry experiences and possible problems, or having a “Coming Back Party” where students can share their experience, because “sometimes it is hard to find someone who will listen.”

Their suggestions to future students were to keep in contact with the people they studied abroad with and to “keep connected” with them through telephone, Internet, or even visiting them. The respondents also suggested that students need to communicate with their friends and family while abroad to know what is going on. One respondent noticed that it is important for students coming back from studying abroad to tell family and friends about how they might need “some time to adjust and get back into things” and create “open lines of communication between friends and family.”

There were many pieces of advice from respondents under another interview question, “What advice can you give how to deal with re-entry shock?” They included the following: looking at pictures taken abroad, starting a scrap book, keeping a diary, staying connected with people they went abroad with, finding new things to do, travelling, talking to someone who will listen, letting people know what they are going through, and taking time to adjust.

*Reentry Orientation.* One interview question from the section “Now” focused on students’ opinions about developing a reentry orientation. All 13 interviewees agreed that there should be one (see Figure 13). The words they used to express their agreement was that there “should be one” or “could be one,” that an orientation program “would be very beneficial,” “would be helpful,” would be “a good idea,” “a great idea,” or simply answered “yes.” They explained their answers by saying that it could help to share the experience of studying abroad, find people who relate to this experience, listen to other students who have gone through reentry experiences, and learn about the ways to deal with possible reentry difficulties. Some suggested that this orientation should be “very informal” in comparison with the very structured pre-departure orientation. It was stated that advisors should talk about ways to use the study abroad experience in the future. One respondent suggested having small groups of people get together, divided by country, so they could relate better to each other.



*Figure 12.* Interviewees’ Attitudes towards the Development of UND Reentry Orientation.

## *The Survey*

### *Incorporated Strategies*

One survey question from the section “Back to U.S.A.” focused on how students dealt with reentry discomfort. There were 60 responses to this question; four people did not answer. Participants could choose from given statements or write their answer in the “other” box. Thirty-eight students said that they talked to their friends that they made studying abroad; 28 people said that they talked to other people who could understand their experience; 20 respondents reported that they watched movies, read books, or listened to the music from the country they studied in. Nine respondents got involved with the International Center at UND, and 16 stopped talking about their study abroad experience to people after several months. One person tried to forget the experience; 14 people said that it does not apply to them because they did not experience discomfort during reentry or wrote their explanation in the “other” box (see Table 2).

*Table 2. Strategies Developed by the Survey Participants to Deal with Reentry Discomfort*

Survey Question: How did you deal with discomfort? (Answer Options)	Response Count
Talked to my friends that I made while studying abroad	38
Talked to other people who could understand my experience	28
Watched movies, read books, or listened to the music from the country I studied in	20
Got involved with International Center	9



Stopped talking about my study abroad experience to people after several months	16
Tried to forget what I experienced	1
Does NOT apply to me	14
No Answer	4

Out of nine people who chose “other,” seven expanded on the given statements, and two gave different answers, including one respondent who reported avoiding friends that were not abroad, and another respondent reported being unable to deal with discomfort. This was a male who went to Norway for a semester and had not travelled abroad before, who stated:

I was unable to deal with the discomfort. My friends and family did not respond to my new attitudes and ideals in the ways that I thought they would. I handled them for a while until the school semester began. I was unable to adjust myself back to my old roles and I was diagnosed with depression. After counseling and medication I was able to deal with the discomfort of not having my changed self be accepted by my family and friends.

Another survey question from the section “Reflecting on Your Experience” asked if students attended a Coming Back Party when they came back to the U.S. after studying abroad. Out of 66 survey participants, 34 did not attend (51%), 7 attended (11%), and 26 did not answer the question (39%) presumably because it was in the last section of the survey “Understanding Culture” where one-fourth of participants did not answer any questions.

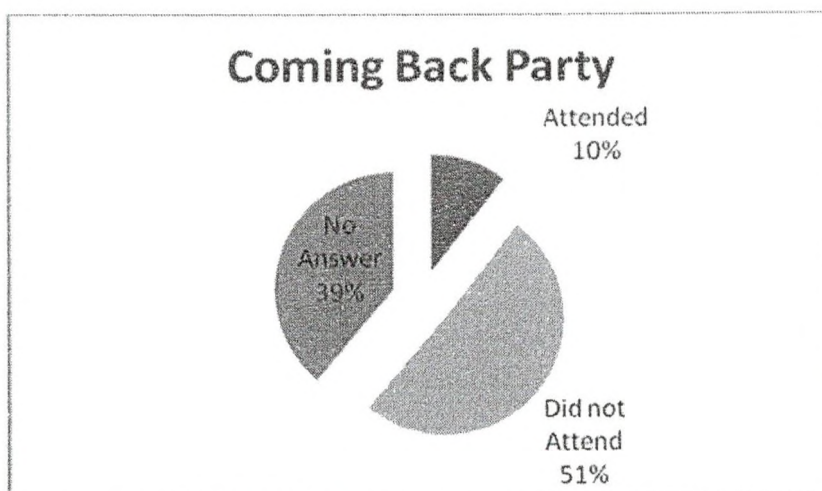


Figure 13. The Survey Participants' Attendance at UND Coming Back Party.

In the following survey question students were asked to explain why they did not attend the party. Out of 34 survey participants who pointed out that they did not attend it, 18 students did not know about it, 17 students were not available, two did not think it was helpful, and one did not care.

The next survey question was for those students who attended the party. Out of seven people, seven students agreed that it helped them to talk about their experience to other students; three said it was helpful in providing them with the information about what they can do with their new experience in the future; three said that it helped them understand that they were not the only ones experiencing reentry discomfort; and three made new friends with other students.

### *Recommended Strategies*

Another survey question from the section, "Reflections on Your Experience," asked students to share their experience on dealing with reentry discomfort. Fifty-nine people skipped this question probably because it was in the last section of the survey "Understanding Culture" and it was an open-ended question. However, eighteen students

shared their advice and their recommendations can be divided into three categories: preparation, communication, and reentry adjustment.

For preparation, students had many opinions. One said that future study abroad students need to expect that their lives will be different, “almost like studying abroad all over again.” One said that having an open mind before you leave is very important, another that it is necessary to be prepared for it will take some time to adjust to people and life at home. Several respondents said that students need to be prepared that their friends might not understand them, and it will be hard to talk to them about the experience. One person suggested that a personal e-mail needs to be sent to “all study abroad students alerting them to where they can go and who they can talk to if they are having troubles coping with re-entry.”

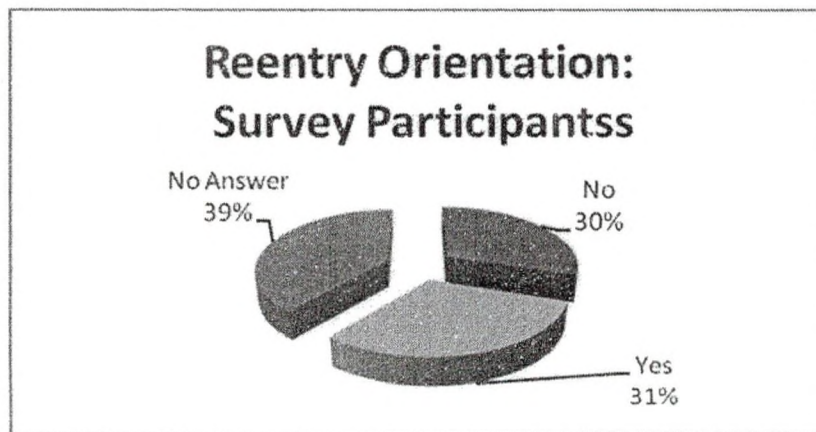
The importance of communication was mentioned by many students. Several said that students need to keep connected with the friends they made abroad because “you’ll miss them and they’ll miss you, too.” Many respondents suggested that it helps talking to the people who can relate to the experience. One person said: “I felt like it was easier to talk about my experience to my family, especially because we have been traveling since I was a little girl.” One person suggested that in order to overcome the possible communication problems with their old friends, it is necessary to talk to them before leaving home and “make plans to spend time with them.” Another suggested preparing a short-version story for the people about your experience to avoid talking about study abroad experience for a long time to people who might not be interested. Another suggested letting friends and family know how students really feel, and gave the example:



I lost a good friend because I wanted to be alone, and he took it as I was stuck up since I studied abroad and I was “too good” for him, but actually it was for other reasons. We are no longer friends.

Some suggested seeking counseling if necessary. Some advised that to deal with adjustment during reentry, students can “get involved with international or study abroad issues” and help prepare others students to go abroad. Some noted that it might be a good idea to have a reentry programs for those who might have difficulties. Some recommended taking some time to relax, “clear you head and get over the jet leg” before seeing friends and relatives. One student said that it is important to learn to appreciate both the home and the host cultures.

*Reentry Orientation.* One survey question from the section, “Reflections on Your Experience,” asked students if they thought it was necessary to design a Reentry Orientation that would help future returnees to readjust to their home culture (Figure 14).



*Figure 14.* Survey Participants’ Attitudes towards the Development of UND Reentry Orientation.

Twenty students (30%) gave a positive answer, 21 (31%) gave a negative one, and 26 (39%) did not answer probably because it was in the last section skipped by one-fourth of the participants.

### Summary

This chapter presented the results from both the interviews and the survey, which were divided into four parts related to the four instrument questions. The results in the first part, *Reentry Feelings*, indicated that most students felt mixed or “bitter-sweet” feelings during reentry. Many of them also pointed out that they had experienced reentry discomfort. The explanations given by students about this discomfort included the following: missing their new friends, adapting to the old lifestyles, communication difficulties, changes in cultural identity, and changed perception of the world.

The results in the second part, *Reentry Communication Problems*, demonstrated that almost half of the respondents had communication problems with both their family and friends. Comparison of the results illustrated that students had more communication problems with their friends than with their relatives.

The results of the third part, *Changes in Cultural Identity*, showed that students experienced various changes that reflected on how they viewed themselves, their culture, other cultures, people in their culture, and the world in general. The students reported the development of both, critical and appreciative, perspectives of their culture and new perspectives of the world.

The results from the fourth part, *Reentry Strategies*, pointed out that communication strategies were mentioned the most. Students pointed out that communication with new friends, people they went with to study abroad, or those who

had some travelling experience, would be necessary for successful reentry because these people can relate to students' experiences, will be interested in listening, and understand the challenges of the reentry. Preparation for reentry was also mentioned by many students. The idea of developing a reentry orientation for future study abroad students was highly supported by all the interviewees and by one-third of the survey participants.



## CHAPTER V

### ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

This chapter illustrates how the results of the study support, contradict or add to the existing literature. It covers the same four themes mentioned in the results chapter: *reentry feelings*, *reentry communication challenges*, *changes in cultural identity*, and *reentry strategies*, as well as the new theme, *cultural identity, communication, and cultural reentry*, which explores the interconnectedness between the previous themes. The short summary of the analysis is presented at the end of the chapter.

#### Reentry Feelings

As discussed in the literature review of this study, an overwhelming amount of applied research and theoretical approaches to cross-cultural experiences consider the adaptation to a foreign culture, as well as the re-adaptation to the home culture, within a negative rather than a positive framework. Adaptation to a foreign culture has been viewed negatively as “shock” (Oberg, 1953), “illness” (Adler, 1987), “deprivation” (Fuhrman, 1888), “frustration” (Anderson, 1994), or “crisis” (Weaver, 1994). Re-adaptation to the home culture has also been treated negatively as “shock” (Uehara, 1986), “stress” (Gaw, 2000), or “difficulty” (Ward, 2001). Adaptation and re-adaptation have been theorized as evolving from an initial “stress” stage towards a final “growth” stage in the intercultural transformation theory (Kim, 2001), from a lack of knowledge of the environment to a familiarity with the environment in the cross-cultural adaptation

theory (Kim, 2001), and from self-concept disturbance to redefinition of the self in the cultural identity model of repatriation (Sussman, 2000). Even theoretical approaches that seem more positively oriented, such as the U-curve and W-curve models that start with a “honeymoon” stage of adaptation and of re-adaptation, ultimately use a negative framework, since the initial stage of euphoria is immediately followed by one of crisis.

### *Discomfort*

Various studies on cultural reentry described various negative feelings. Uehara (1986) described the symptoms of reentry shock as physical distress, anxiety, apathy, loneliness, and feelings of loss. Gaw (2000) added to this list such feelings as alienation, disorientation, stress, value confusion, anger, hostility, compulsive fears, helplessness, disenchantment, and discrimination. Such negative feelings were referred to in the literature as “psychological” difficulties (Ward et al., 2001) that contribute to reentry shock.

I have chosen the word “discomfort” to avoid the extreme negative connotations of the words “stress” and “shock.” The results of this research supported the literature by showing that many UND students have experienced some kind of reentry discomfort. A majority (71%) of the survey participants indicated that they felt bored, depressed, confused or alienated. Most interview participants (eleven out of 13) also experienced some kind of discomfort by feeling sad, not comfortable, annoyed, and others.

### *Duration of Discomfort*

The literature emphasizes that the length of reentry discomfort varies from one month to a year or even longer (Adler, 1981; Carlisle-Frank, 1992). The results of this

research supported the literature, and illustrated that the duration of discomfort for UND students varied, ranging from one month to six months and longer.

### *Reasons for Discomfort*

There was a variety of factors studied that could possibly contribute to this discomfort. Martin (1984) divided them into three groups: background factors (gender, age, academic level, previous cross-cultural experience, and nationality); host culture factors (location and duration of sojourn, degree of interaction with host culture, readiness to return home); and a reentry factor (reentry environment). Other studied factors included such as differences between home and host cultures for U.S. study-abroad students (Raschio, 1988), level of satisfaction in foreign country and at home (Lester, 2000; Sussman 2002), and others.

The most common factors mentioned by UND students to explain their reentry discomfort were communication problems, personal changes due to cultural experiences, development of new perspectives of the world, and missing new friends they made in a foreign country. Communication problems and feeling of loss (referred to missing new friends) were already mentioned in the previous research studies as contributing factors. Personal changes due to cultural experiences as well as the development of new perspectives of the world were studied mostly as an outcome of cultural reentry but not as a contributing factor. This finding will be further explored in the next part, *Changes in Cultural Identities*.

### *Bitter-Sweet Feelings*

A major finding of this study is that whereas researchers and theorists predominantly propose a negative model of approaching cross-cultural experiences,



interview and survey respondents among UND students express various positive and mixed feelings related to reentry rather than mostly negative ones. A majority of the survey respondents (46%) reported only positive reentry feelings, such as excitement, happiness or relief, and many other survey respondents (39%) reported mixed reentry feelings. A majority of interview respondents (eight out of 13) stated that they had prevalently mixed, “bitter-sweet” reentry feelings, and several other interview respondents (three out of 13) said that reentry was “easy” and “exciting,” and that they were “happy” to return to their families and friends, and to the world they knew. Although this study started from the premises of the negative framework predominant in the existing literature on cross-cultural experiences, it has shifted towards an understanding that the research population was not operating within the same framework. This study still addresses issues related to reentry discomfort, but does so within a new perspective that recognizes that reentry is not necessarily associated with a linear direction going from negative to positive feelings, from a feeling of loss to one of gain, or from a stage of stress to one of comfort.

### Reentry Communication Problems

There have been a limited number of studies that explore communication problems during reentry. Martin (1986) found that social relationships between the returnees, their relatives and friends might change due to their cross-cultural experiences. In addition, whereas relationships with relatives might change more positively, relationships with friends might have mixed outcomes. Cushener and Brislin (1997) pointed out that lack of interest in the sojourners’ experiences from the side of relatives and friends is one of the common reentry communication challenges. Wang (1997)

suggested that relatives and friends might not have the capacity for listening and understanding the cross-cultural experiences of the returnees. Storti (2003) pointed out that even though parents are more interested in the experiences of their children, their understanding and appreciation is still limited.

This study adds to the somewhat limited literature on communication problems during cultural reentry. The results of the current research show that *most* UND students in the study agreed to having various challenges in communicating with their friends and relatives. The interviewees explained that their family members or friends were not able to “relate,” “understand,” or “listen” to their study abroad stories. Some students pointed out that friends and relatives could not relate because they never travelled abroad, which supports several views from the reviewed literature on culture. Growing up in one culture without being exposed to other cultures, people develop ethnocentrism that prevents them from understanding the views of other cultures and its elements (Shaules, 2007). Thus, it can prevent relatives and friends who have never been abroad from understanding the experiences of study abroad students. Ting-Toomey (1999) pointed out that one of the functions that culture serves is a function of group inclusion, where people do not have to justify and explain their behaviors to the members of the same cultural group. Thus, when students return home after being exposed to a new culture for several months or even a year, they are not able to explain and justify their new patterns of thinking and feeling to the members of the home country who did not have the same cross-cultural experiences. Thus, students are not included in their home culture right away because of the changes they have undergone abroad and changes they continue to experience after their return. Inability to “fit in” leads to challenges in communication. This inability to “fit in” and to



explain their experiences to their family members and friends can be clarified with the help of the Coordinated Management of Meaning theory. After experiencing a new social reality, new ways of thinking and behaving, sojourners are not able to coordinate new meanings they acquired through cross cultural experiences with the members of the home culture who did not have such experiences.

I also compared the challenges in communication with family members and friends reported by the study participants. The results illustrated that students had more communication problems with their friends than with parents. This can be explained by proposing that parents are more closely related to the sojourners and personally have more desire to understand and help their children. Friends might not have the same desire to understand and might even develop jealousy or feelings of inferiority that were reported by the study participants and might lead to strained relationships.

### Changes in Cultural Identity

Previous applied research and theoretical approaches taken to understand the relationship between culture and cultural identity mostly concentrated on a cultural function of inclusion mentioned by Ting-Toomey (1999), where people need to “fit in” in the environment where they grew up or a new environment into which they moved. They view the ultimate goal of cross-cultural experiences in terms of “assimilation” (Berry, 1980), “acculturation” (Kim, 2001) or “intercultural adaptation” (Redfield, et al., 1936),

Those researchers, who concentrated on understanding the changes in cultural identity during adaptation to a new culture, view this goal in terms of very distinct outcomes. They tend to categorize them by emphasizing more successful and unsuccessful ones. The outcomes of successful changes in cultural identities are viewed



as the development of “constructive marginality” (Sussman, 1993), “intercultural identity” (Kim, 2001) or “third-culture perspective” (Gudykunst, et al., 1977). Unsuccessful changes are viewed as “marginal” (Berry, 1980) or “encapsulated marginals” (Sussman, 1993).

The same tendency is observed in the approaches taken by a number of limited researchers who studied cultural identity and reentry. Successful outcomes of cross cultural identity during reentry are viewed as “global identifiers” (Sussman 2000), “proactive returnees” (Adler, 1997), and those “integrated” (Cox, 2004). The unsuccessful are viewed as “alienated” (Adler, 1997), “subtracted” (Sussman, 2000), and “disintegrated” (Cox, 2004).

By conducting this study, I found that whereas researchers and theorists concentrate on changes in cultural identity as an outcome of cross-cultural experiences, UND students indicated the development of reflective perspectives on their cross-cultural experiences, on their culture, on themselves and the world. The overwhelming majority of interview and survey respondents reported that they became more critical of U.S culture, more appreciative or both, due to their cross-cultural experiences. The verbs that they used to explain how they learned to reflect on the changes in cultural identities included: “I realized,” “I became more aware,” and “I noticed.”

#### *Critical and Appreciative Perspectives*

As it was mentioned earlier, most of the previous research on cultural identity and reentry is connected with cross-cultural outcomes. A limited number of researchers who studied the development of new perspectives on the home culture, such as Wallen et al.

(2005) and Sussman (2002), noticed that many sojourners develop mostly critical perspective on their culture.

The results indicate that the majority of UND students in this study almost evenly developed both perspectives, critical and appreciative. The cultural elements used in the survey questionnaire included education, social system, political system, style of life, and education. Most of the critical perspectives concentrated on the style of life and included loving “convenience,” eating a lot, taking many things “for granted,” consumerism. Most of the appreciative perspectives concentrated on education that gives various opportunities for the future.

### *Perspectives on the World*

Most of the previous researchers who talked about outcomes of cultural reentry, mentioned changed perceptions of the world, such as development of the “broader world view” (Church, 1982), acquisition of “culturally appropriate behaviors” (Ward, 1996), and others.

The results of this study indicated that the survey respondents also changed their perspectives on the world. They used such phrases as “it broadened my mind,” “I became more open,” “I became more aware,” “I become more understanding.” Several people made observations about the world that is “small” and “connected,” “people are people” everywhere, and some became aware of the differences in the world.

The results of this study point on a new approach that can be taken in understanding changes in cultural identity during reentry. These changes can be not only viewed as the outcomes of cross-cultural experiences as done by previous researchers, but also from the perspective of a process where people learn to reflect on their cross-



cultural experiences. This new approach needs to emphasize the individuality of every person who has unique experiences and insights going through adaptation to a host culture and readaptation to a home culture.

### Reentry Strategies

There were various strategies mentioned by the UND participants. In this section, I divided them into two types: preparation and arrival strategies. Also, I highlighted the communication strategies most commonly mentioned by students and after noticing that each fits into a certain strategic stage, I divided them accordingly.

#### *Preparation Strategies*

Development of reentry strategies is considered to be very important by many theorists and practitioners. The extensive research showed that *preparation* for possible reentry challenges is an important element in minimizing reentry difficulties. Many researchers consider that this preparation can help to “predict” (Sussman, 2001), “alleviate” (Ward et al., 2001), or “minimize” (Westwood et al., 1986) reentry difficulties. Being psychologically prepared for reentry challenges (Sussman, 2001) or simply being aware (Moles, 1994) might decrease them and help students cope with negative reentry experiences.

The results of this research showed that the majority of UND students felt it was important to prepare future students about the reentry process and supported the results of the previous research studies. All 13 interviewees pointed out that “it is important” or “very important” to have such preparation. They noticed that preparation needs to cover various social problems, such as communication with relatives and friends, as well as psychological problems, such as feeling “weird” in the home country, inability to deal



with old and new problems due to new experiences, knowing that “life will be different,” and others.

### *Arrival Strategies*

Another important element noticed by the researchers was the development of the arrival strategies that can help students realize that it is normal to experience various changes on a personal level in relationships and on the level of the changed environment as well as helping them to deal with these changes (Wang, 1997). Reentry workshops can educate students about various transition difficulties (Cox, 2006), give them the possibility to interact with others (Ward, 1999) and reflect on their cross-cultural experiences (Arthur, 2003).

The results of this study supported the existing literature and showed that many students thought that the development of a reentry workshop would be beneficial for students who return to the U.S. after studying abroad. All the interviewees expressed their agreement with this idea by using such words as “should be one,” “could be one,” “would be very beneficial,” “would be helpful,” or simply “good idea.” They thought its value might be in learning about the ways to deal with reentry challenges, sharing cross-cultural experiences, learning how to use these experiences in the future, and others. Twenty-three survey participants (out of 43 who answered the question) thought it was necessary to design a reentry workshop. It was just a simple question of “Yes” or “No” about if they thought it is necessary to have reentry orientation that can help students to adjust to their own culture. I did not explain what a reentry workshop might cover. Thus, it might be that more people would see the benefits of the workshop if the description was given to the survey participants as it was given to the interviewees. I also think that most of the

students who participated in a survey had some kind of negative associations with a reentry workshop. This assumption comes from the answer that was given about the “Coming Back Party” that is prepared by education abroad advisors and Student Leaders at the end of each semester for the students returning home. Thirty-five people (out of 43 who responded to the question) did not visit this party because they did not know about it, did not think it was important, did not think it could help them, did not care, or were not available.

### *Communication Strategies*

Communication is considered to be one of the important elements during reentry. It was found that communication with certain groups of people, such as host nationals (Rohrlich & Martin, 1991), parents (Yoshida et al., 2002), and other repatriates (Wang, 1997) during reentry workshops can also be connected with better reentry adjustment.

An important finding of this study is that communication strategies were mentioned the most by UND students when they talked about reentry. Eleven interviewees (out of 13) and 43 survey participants (out of 66) noticed that communication with people who can understand and relate to their experience, such as friends they made abroad and other people who have travelled before, was very helpful to them. Communication strategies mentioned by UND students can be divided into three categories: “before the departure,” “while abroad,” and “after the return.” “Before the departure” included letting relatives and friends know about possible reentry challenges and prepare them to understand changes the sojourners might experience abroad and at home. “While abroad” communication strategies for students included “keep connected” to relatives and U.S. friends with various media to minimize communication problems



during reentry. There was also a suggestion for study abroad advisors to send personal e-mail right before the departure for the U.S. that will warn students about the reentry process and prepare them for possible challenges. “After the return” communication strategies for students included staying in touch with the friends they made abroad and with other people who can relate to cross cultural experiences or joining Student Leaders to communicate their experiences to future study abroad students. Recommendations were also made for education abroad advisors to have a “coming-back party” or “orientation” where students can share their experiences, listen to others, reflect on their changes, and learn about different ways of dealing with reentry challenges.

These results show the importance of creating shared meanings about the cross-cultural experiences for UND students and being able to reflect on them. Communication on different levels can help students to share their cross-cultural experience, feel understood and to be able to reflect on the changes happening to them due to these experiences.

### Cultural Identity, Communication, and Cultural Reentry

There are various studies that examined interconnectedness between various factors referred to reentry, but only a few of them concentrated on cultural identity and reentry. Wallen et al. (2005) examined the relationship between them and found that they are connected. Sussman (2000) studied changes in cultural identity and reentry experience and proposed that shifts in cultural identity can be a mediator between cultural adaptation and the reentry experience.

This study examined this interconnectedness between cultural identity, communication, and cultural reentry and found that they are connected.



### *Cultural Identity and Reentry Discomfort*

UND students pointed out that one of the reasons why they experienced reentry discomfort was because they “changed and every one else in America stayed the same” and because they “looked at the world from the new perspective.” They also acknowledged the development of various critical and appreciative perspectives on their home culture and new perspective on the world. Thus, I became convinced that there is a definite connection between reentry discomfort and changes in cultural identity. Also, I realized that reentry discomfort should not be treated only negatively. It can be perceived as a necessary stage for growth and development of new understandings of one’s home culture and the world. The majority of students agreed they experienced some sort of reentry discomfort, but also most of them showed the development of new perspectives and understandings.

### *Communication and Cultural Reentry*

I also noticed the connection between changed cultural identities and communication problems which seemed to be not previously studied. Many UND students acknowledged various communication problems with their friends and relatives by noticing these persons’ inability or lack of desire to listen to the students’ cross-cultural experiences. It might mean that, by changing their cultural identities, students were not able to create shared meanings with home culture members who did not experience changes in their cultural identities and were not able to relate to those of students. This lack of shared meaning created gaps in communication.

My next observation on communication and cultural reentry is connected with the strategies that UND students developed to deal with communication and other related

problems with cultural reentry. The overwhelming majority of the study participants pointed out that they started to look for the people with whom they can create shared meanings of cross-cultural experiences and found them in other study abroad students, new friends they made abroad, and other people who had travelled overseas. Thus, communication problems were solved by communication solutions such as finding the right people who could relate to students' cross-cultural experiences and could help to reflect on the changes students experienced during reentry.

### *Cultural Identity, Communication, and Cultural Reentry*

This study adds a new dimension to understanding the relationship between changes in cultural identity, communication problems, and reentry experiences. Through conducting this study, I realized that changes in cultural identities and inability to communicate study abroad experiences contributed to various reentry experiences of UND students. Due to changed cultural identities brought about by study abroad experience and the inability to realize all the changes they have undergone, students experience various feelings of discomfort and were not able create to share some meanings with home culture members. However, with the help of various reentry strategies, including communication strategies of finding people who had cross-cultural experience, participating in reentry workshops where returnees can meet such people, learning how to reflect on the changes right after the return home and how to deal with feelings of discomfort, returning students can minimize negative feelings and experiences and make reentry more positive and effective (see Figure 15).



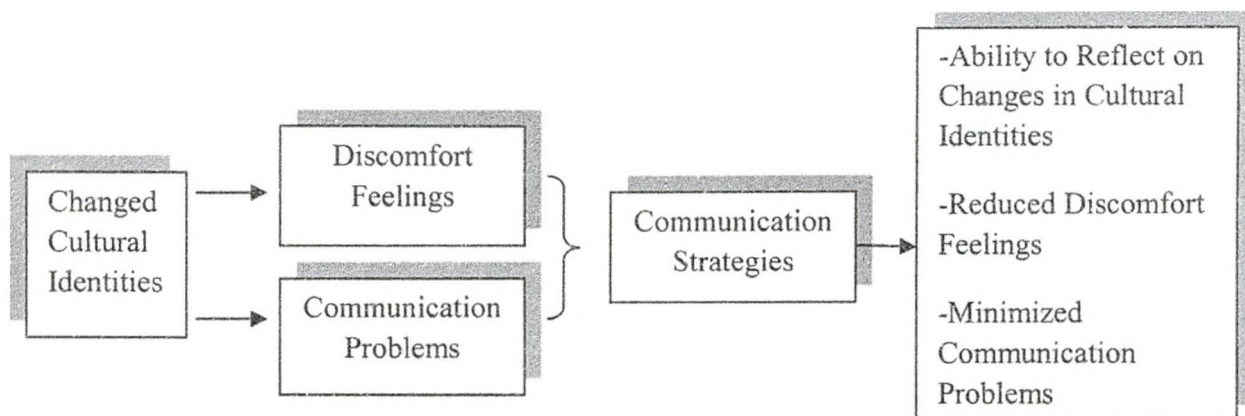


Figure 15. Interconnections between Cultural Identity, Communication, and Cultural Reentry

By understanding this interconnectedness, education abroad advisors can help students to reflect on the changes in cultural identities, point out the positive aspect of reentry discomfort, explain the nature of reentry communication problems, and highlight possible communication resources as one of the reentry strategies.

### Summary

The results of this study added to the understanding of cultural reentry in several areas. I not only analyzed the four themes from the results chapter dealing with reentry feelings, reentry communication challenges, changes in cultural identity, and reentry strategies, but also explored the connections between them. The most important findings are summarized below.

When exploring *reentry feelings*, I found that many UND students acknowledged experiencing reentry discomfort that supports the findings of previous studies. However, it was found that *most* of the students had ‘*bitter-sweet*’ feelings that were not previously supported by the literature. Thus, it might be advisable not to categorize them into positive and negative but help students individually reflect on what they feel and assist them to understand the reasons for these feelings.



When exploring *reentry communication problems*, the results of this study show that most UND students had various communication problems during reentry with either family members or friends. Also, UND students had more problems communicating with their friends than with relatives. These results supported the findings of the previous limited research on communication and reentry. I expanded the existing literature by suggesting several possible explanations for these problems, observing that the sojourners and members of the home culture are unable to create shared meanings due to cross-cultural experiences of the sojourners and the possible but unrecognized feelings of ethnocentrism of the home cultural members.

When exploring *cultural identity*, the results of this study illustrated that the majority of UND students were reflecting on the transformations in their cultural identities by acknowledging the development of critical and appreciative perspectives on their home culture and a changed perspective of the world. I suggest that changes in cultural identity need to be approached as a learning process and emphasize the individuality of every person instead of treating these changes as stable outcomes in cross-cultural experiences, as done by previous researchers.

When exploring *reentry strategies*, communication strategies were most commonly used by the majority of UND students. I divided them into three stages, such as before the departure, while abroad, and after the return. These communication strategies included finding people who could relate to the cross-cultural experiences and be able to create shared meanings with the returnees. Communicating with other returnees or people who travelled abroad helped returnees to feel good about their experiences and to reflect on the changes in their cultural identities.

When exploring the *connections* between reentry experiences, cultural identity, and communication, I made some interesting observations and came to several realizations. The relationship between reentry experiences and changes in cultural identity were previously explored and the results of the study supported these limited findings on this connection. However, I also found the connection between cultural identity, communication, and cultural reentry experiences. I suggest that changes in cultural identity add to reentry communication problems that further contribute to reentry discomfort. Ability to reflect on these changes, to understand the nature of communication problems, and view reentry discomfort positively as a growing stage might help future study abroad students make reentry experiences more effective and assist education abroad advisors in developing effective reentry strategies.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter starts with the review of the previous chapters, including a statement of the problem, chosen methods, study results, and analysis of the results. Then, recommendations are made for future research and for education abroad advisors. A short summary of the study that follows describes how this study fulfilled its specific purpose of exploring the experiences of UND student participants and describes the understandings gained through conducting the research.

#### Review of the Chapters

In the first chapter, “Introduction,” I presented the background of the study and explained why this study was conducted. Personally, I have been interested in exploring how culture contributes to the formation of and changes in individuals through cross-cultural experiences. The idea of this study was born when I met with education abroad advisors at the University of North Dakota, where I am currently studying, and they pointed out the need to study the cultural reentry experiences of their students. Thus, I wanted to learn more about cultural reentry and to apply my knowledge and expertise to benefit UND students, education abroad advisors and other researchers in the field.

In the second chapter, “Literature Review,” I presented an somewhat extensive review of the following themes: culture and cultural identity; cross-cultural experiences of living in a foreign culture and returning to a home culture; and theories and models of



intercultural adaptation and readaptation. Most of the previous research concentrated on understanding sojourners' adaptation to a new culture and the factors that contribute to their experiences. Even though the number of research studies to understand readaptation to a home culture is increasing, there is still a need to develop theoretical understanding of this process and explore reentry experiences and their contributing factors. While reviewing the literature, I found that such factors as changes in cultural identity during reentry and reentry communication challenges were not extensively explored for an understanding of how they contribute to reentry experiences.

In the third chapter, "Methods," I described the research design, the chosen methods, unique features of the population, data collection process, and data analysis. This qualitative study sought to understand in depth the reentry experiences of UND students and the factors that contributed to their experiences. I used the grounded theory method to design the research and analyze the data. I used two research methods, interviews and a survey, to ensure the validity of the data. The population consisted of UND students who studied abroad for a semester or two between the Fall of 2003 and the Spring of 2007. This population was easy to access because I am a current UND student and education abroad advisors at UND were willing to become a link between me and the research population. The unique features of this population were connected with the state of the U.S. culture in general and the North Dakota culture in particular. I used the principles from grounded theory to analyze the data by reading the data, finding common themes, rereading the data, revising the literature, and dividing themes into categories. The following four categories emerged from the analysis: "reentry feelings," "changes in cultural identities," "reentry communication problems," and "reentry strategies."

In the fourth chapter, “Results,” I described the results collected from the interviews and the survey and divided them into four parts connected with the four categories emerging from the data analysis. The results from the *Reentry Feelings* part indicated that most UND students felt mixed feelings during reentry, including positive and negative feelings. Explanations for these feelings reported by students were also described. The results from the *Reentry Communication Problems* part showed that almost half of the respondents had communication problems with both their family and friends, and that students had more communication problems with their friends than with their relatives. The results from the *Changes in Cultural Identity* part indicated that students developed both critical and appreciative perspectives of their culture, as well as new perspectives of the world. The results from *Reentry Strategies* indicated that communication strategies were mentioned the most by UND students. Preparation for reentry and the idea of developing a reentry orientation was also mentioned by many of them.

In the fifth chapter, “Analysis and Interpretations,” I cover the same four themes described in the “Results” chapter and the connections between them. In analyzing *reentry feelings* I noticed that a majority of UND students reported various feelings of reentry discomfort, which supported the findings of the previous research. However, I found that the majority of UND students did not report only positive or negative feelings during reentry, but the combination of both, not previously shown in the literature. In analyzing *reentry communication problems*, I observed that half of UND students reported communication problems, a finding supported by the literature. I also found that students had more challenges in communicating with friends rather than close relatives, a



finding supported by the limited research in this area. In analyzing *changes in cultural identity*, I observed that UND students reflect on the development of critical and appreciative perspectives of their home culture and the changed perspectives of the world. Previous research concentrated on categorizing the changes in cultural identities and treated them as stable outcomes of cross-cultural experiences. This research study illustrates students' ability to reflect on their home culture and to view changes in cultural identities as a continuing process. This is a new perspective on how changes in cultural identity can be studied. When exploring *reentry strategies*, I noticed that communication strategies were mentioned the most by UND students. I divided them into three stages for easier interpretation, such as before the departure, while abroad, and after the return. When exploring the *connections* between cultural identity, communication and cultural reentry that had not been previously done, I suggested that changes in cultural identity add to reentry communication problems that further contribute to reentry discomfort.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are developed for future research and for education abroad advisors at UND and other universities. Future research is recommended on all five themes discussed in the previous chapter "Analysis and Interpretations." The suggesting for education abroad advisors are divided into before the departure of students, while students are abroad, and after students return to the U.S.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

The following specific recommendations are connected with reentry feelings, changes in cultural identity and reflexivity, communication, and interconnectedness between reentry experiences, changes in cultural identity, and communication.



Reentry experiences need to be explored from a variety of perspectives, specifically not only in a linear direction going from negative to positive feelings, from a feeling of loss to one of gain, or from a stage of stress to one of comfort. It is simultaneously both “bitter” and “sweet.” Further research need to explain why students experience these mixed feelings during reentry and how they take more individual approaches, returning home after studying abroad.

Reentry communication problems need to be further explored to support the limited research in this area. The research needs to further explore how changes in cultural identity contribute to reentry communication problems. The role of technology also needs to be further studied as an important element of modern communication during study abroad and particularly after.

Future research on changes in cultural identity needs to further explore the development of various perspectives on students’ home culture and the world. It can also compare the transformations students experience in their cultural identities during adaptation to a new culture with the transformations they experience while readaptating to their home country. Needed is a new approach of viewing changes in cultural identity as a process that starts when students go to a foreign country and continues when they return to their home culture, readapting to a home culture, reflecting on their continuing changes, and enriching their understanding of themselves, their home culture.

Studies on reentry strategies need to further explore the benefits of various communication strategies, which can be done by exploring reentry communication on various levels – micro, mesa, and macro. Micro-levels can concentrate on how students communicate with themselves and reflect on personal changes and cross-cultural

experiences. Meso-levels communication might explore how students communicate with their close friends and relatives. Communication on macro-levels could include students' communication experiences with people around them, such as peers at school, possible employers and other people with whom they are not close.

Future research also can explore the interconnections between cultural identity, communication, and cultural reentry. Cross-cultural adaptation theory, which explores communication, cultural identity, and functional fitness in adaptation to a foreign country, should be continued to understand readaptation to a home culture. Future research can seek to understand how preparation of future study abroad students about possible changes in cultural identity and possible communication strategies can lessen reentry discomfort.

The results of this study will be shared with other international educators during various conferences and presentations. For example, I plan to present at a local, regional, or national conference for the National Association for Students Affairs: Association of International Educators (NAFSA). I also plan to publish my results in some scholarly communication and education journals.

### *Recommendations for Education Abroad Advisors*

I have developed several recommendations for study abroad advisors that are based on the research findings of this study. I have divided them into three areas: before students go abroad, while they are abroad, and after they return to their home country.

First, I recommend preparing students about possible reentry experiences *before* they go to study abroad. Several UND students have pointed out that it would be good to know about reentry challenges before leaving the home country. This study suggests that



students need be warned about the most common problems that came out of this study: communication challenges with home culture members and changes in cultural identity. This can be done during pre-departure orientation in a small cultural session that previously was mostly focused on cultural shock issues and suggestions on how to overcome it. I recommend that the cultural session be expanded and cover not only issues on cultural adaptation to a foreign country but also issues on cultural reentry and reentry strategies. To address communication problems, education abroad advisors need to inform students that it is necessary to keep in touch while abroad and to warn their friends and family members about the changes they might undergo while abroad in order to prepare them to accept new changes in returnees. To address changes in cultural identity, a cultural workshop can be designed before students go abroad. It can cover the following topics: distinctive features of American culture, distinctive features of a culture students are going to visit, and possible outcomes of cultural contact. It can prepare them to adapt easier to a new culture and warn them that they might become critical of their own culture. This workshop can also teach students how to reflect on their cultural experiences while abroad and during reentry.

Second, I recommend that education abroad advisors work with students *while* they are abroad. They need to remind students to keep in touch with their family and friends to create shared meanings of their experiences. This can lessen communication problems and prepare relatives and U.S. friends to accept changes in the sojourners. Study abroad advisors can send out articles on reentry issues right before students return to prepare them for the possible challenges. Also, they can send the articles that can encourage students to reflect on the changes that they are undergoing abroad and might



undergo at home. Education abroad advisors can recommend students to get contact information from all their new friends, to buy books, music, and video materials in a foreign country that they can share with their friends and relative and use to remind themselves of the foreign culture they experienced. Last, education abroad advisors will need to send out the list of possible events students can visit to share study abroad experiences, learn to reflect on their personal changes and newly acquired skills, talk about reentry challenges, and learn how to use their experiences in their future careers.

Third, I have several recommendations for education abroad advisors that can be developed to help students *after* they return home. There can be a friendly informal gathering organized where students can share their experiences. There can be also a contest organized where students can prepare the presentation about their study abroad experiences that could include their exiting and challenging experiences. This will help students to feel good about their experience, feel that it can be used, and help them reflect on it. A formal Reentry Orientation can be designed that will teach students how to use their cultural experience and new skills in the future. The Student Leaders' group needs to be present at all of these events to invite returned students to join them and use their study experience to help future study abroad students. Last, education abroad advisors together with Student Leaders could design a web page where students can share their experiences, feelings, and concerns.

These are just some recommendations that came out of this research. Education abroad advisors are welcome to test them for their effectiveness.

## Summary of the Study

This study attempted to understand reentry experiences of UND students and seems successful in doing so. I found that most of the UND students had mixed feelings of happiness and excitement combined with various feelings of discomfort. More than a half of them reported having various communication problems with their relatives and friends, who were unable to understand and relate to their cross-cultural experiences. Communication with friends seemed to be more challenging than communication with relatives. Most of the students also experienced some changes in their cultural identity by reporting a development of both critical and appreciative perspectives of their home culture as well as new perspectives of the world. As for reentry strategies, communication strategies were mentioned more often than of other strategies. Returnees reported that those new friends they made abroad, other UND students who studied abroad, or people with various cross-cultural experiences were the most helpful resources for sharing experiences, reflecting on personal changes and learning about the ways of dealing with reentry challenges. The results of this study will be shared with UND students and education abroad advisors in the form of a short report and formal presentation. I hope that this study will increase the understanding of reentry experiences and will be used to design workshops or presentations for future study abroad students in order to make their reentry more beneficial.

By conducting this study, I have sharply increased my knowledge of culture and the formation of and changes in cultural identity and developed a deeper understanding of cross-cultural experiences as well as their influences on individuals. I came to the realization that the process of learning about one's culture and acknowledging how a



person is a cultural being, does not often happen often without leaving one's home country and then returning to it. People often do not realize that the culture that surrounds them molds who they are, how they view themselves and others, and how they live their lives. After leaving the home culture and being exposed to a new culture, people develop new understandings of the world and themselves, but they might not fully realize the changes that happen to them due to their cross-cultural experiences. Only when they return to their home country are they able to reflect on what they experienced, how they changed while being abroad, and how they continue to change through comparison of their culture to other cultures they have experienced. Returnees will not come back to the same home culture that they have left to live or study abroad, as it was noticed by Thomas Wolfe and Steven Foster in the first chapter "Introduction," and they might feel sad or disappointed for a while. After living in a new cultural environment, "home" and "home culture" might acquire different meanings. It might not be the same stable and unquestionable reality they used to know when growing up and living in their culture. It can become one of the multiple environments or realities they were exposed to that shaped who they are, how they think and behave. However, if they are able to explain to themselves and to others why this has happened, there will be a new step taken in developing awareness of who they are now and how they became these people.

I also think that it would be beneficial for returnees to participate in some kind of reentry workshop that would give them an opportunity to share their experiences with people who can understand them, to reflect on their personal changes, and to promote personal growth. It might also help them understand that they are not coming back to the



same home culture they used to know due to their exposure to a new cultural reality, as well as to changes that occurred in the home culture while they were gone.

## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

#### *Demographics*

1. Age:
2. Gender :
3. City of Origin:
4. What country did you visit?
5. What year did you study abroad and for how long?
6. Did you go with other UND students or you went alone?
7. Did any of your friends and relatives have ever studied abroad?

#### *Before the departure*

1. Why did you decide to study abroad?
2. What were you excited about?
3. What were you mainly concerned about?
4. Did you know anything about the foreign culture you were going to visit?
5. Did you speak the foreign language of the country you were going to visit?
6. Did you know anything about culture shock before you went?
7. Did you know anything about re-entry shock?

#### *UND Pre-departure Orientation*

1. Did you visit pre-departure orientation before going abroad?
2. Was it helpful in preparing you for study abroad?
3. What did you wish you knew before you went studying abroad?
4. How pre-departure orientation can possibly address those issues?

#### *While Abroad*

1. What were the main differences between the foreign culture and the U.S. culture that you noticed while abroad? (Compare the following concepts of foreign culture and your culture: time concept, greetings, mealtimes, dress, academic workload, and food.)
2. What was the easiest to adapt to?
3. What was the hardest to adapt to?
4. What did you learn about yourself?
5. What skills did you improve/developed?
6. What did you enjoy doing the most overseas?
7. Did you spend a lot of time with other American students?
8. How were you perceived as an American in a foreign country?

#### *Re-Entry*

1. What did you do the first day in the U.S. when you came back from studying abroad?
2. Where you excited or not to come back to the U.S.?



3. Was it hard or not to come back home? Explain.
4. Did you experience any discomfort when you come back home? If yes, for how long?
5. What did you do to escape this discomfort?
6. Was it hard or easy to talk to your relatives about study abroad?
7. Was it hard or easy to talk to your friends about your experience abroad?
8. What were the main changes in family and friends lives while you were abroad?
9. What it hard or easy to start the college life? Explain.
10. What did you think about American culture when you came back home?
11. Did you miss anything from the foreign culture you have visited?
12. Did study abroad experience change you? If yes, in what way? If no, why not?

*Now*

1. How do you want to use your study abroad experience in the future?
2. Do you want to go abroad again in the future?
3. Why did you join Student Leaders Group?
4. Did this group meet your expectations?
5. What suggestions might you have to make this group experience better?
6. Do you think it is necessary to prepare future students who will go abroad about re-entry process? Explain.
7. What suggestions can you have for such preparation?
8. What advice can you give how to deal with re-entry shock?
9. Do you think there is a need to develop a Re-Entry Orientation?

## Appendix B

### Survey Questions

#### *General Information*

1. Demographics
  - Gender
  - Citizenship
  - Age when you last studied abroad
  - Country where you last studied abroad
  - Year you last studied abroad
  - Duration of your last study abroad
2. Are you a Student Leader or have you been one in the past?
  - Yes
  - No
3. Had you gone abroad before your most recent study abroad experience (for travel, work, or study)?
  - Yes
  - No
4. If YES, how long did the longest trip last?
  - 1-2 days
  - 2 weeks-4 weeks
  - 1-2 months
  - 3-4 months
  - 5-7 months
  - 8 months- 1 year
  - 1 year and longer
5. You attended UND Study Abroad Pre-Departure Orientation before going to study abroad.
  - Yes
  - No
6. If YES, UND Study Abroad Pre-Departure Orientation prepared you how to: (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don't Remember)
  - Plan your trip
  - Register for classes in a foreign university
  - Be safe abroad
  - Deal with adaptation to a new culture
  - Travel in a foreign country
  - Manage your finances while abroad
  - Return home safely
  - Adjust to American culture after studying abroad

- Deal with possible discomfort after studying abroad
  - Use your study abroad experience in the future
7. Evaluate your knowledge about the foreign country BEFORE you went to study abroad.
    - Excellent
    - Good
    - Satisfactory
    - Poor
  8. Evaluate your level of a foreign language (other than English) of the foreign country BEFORE you visited it.
    - Excellent
    - Good
    - Satisfactory
    - Poor
    - N/A

#### *While Abroad*

1. If you compare a foreign culture to American culture, how different or similar were the following categories:  
(Very Similar, Similar, Different, Very Different):
  - Food
  - Transportation
  - Pace of Life
  - Clothes
  - Academic workload
  - People's behavior
2. You did not miss home much while studying abroad.
  - Strongly Agree
  - Agree
  - Neutral
  - Disagree
  - Strongly Disagree
3. How often did you communicate with your close relatives?  
(Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Never)
  - By phone
  - By e-mail
4. How often did you communicate with your friends?  
(Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Never)
  - By phone
  - By e-mail



5. Please, reflect on the following statements:  
(Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)
- I enjoyed living in the foreign culture.
  - It was easy to adapt to the foreign country.
  - I spent most of the time with other American students.
  - While abroad, I wished I could speak (speak better) the foreign language of the foreign country I visited.
  - While abroad, I wished I knew more about the foreign culture, history, values.

*Back to USA*

1. How did you feel about your study abroad experience during the first month after you came back to the U.S.? (Choose ALL that apply)
  - Excited
  - Happy
  - Relieved
  - Bored
  - Depressed
  - Confused
  - Alienated
  - Other (please, specify)
2. Did you experience any re-entry discomfort as a result of your study abroad experience after coming back home?
  - Yes
  - No
3. If YES, why did it happen?
  - It was hard to talk about my study abroad experience to people who never been abroad
  - It was hard because I changed and everything in America stayed the same
  - I looked at the world from a new perspective but did not know what to do with it.
  - I did not know how to apply my new knowledge and skills.
  - I did not experience any discomfort.
  - Other (please specify)
4. If YES, how long did it last?
  - 1 month
  - 2 months
  - 3 months
  - 4-5 months
  - 6 months and longer
  - Other (please specify)

5. How did you deal with discomfort?
  - Talked to my friends that I made while studying abroad
  - Talked to other people who could understand my experience
  - Watched movies, read books, or listened to the music from the country I studied in
  - Got involved with International Center
  - Stopped talking about my study abroad experience to people after several months
  - Tried to forget what I experienced
  - Does not apply to me
  - Other (please specify)
6. Was it hard or easy to adapt back to the following things in American life:  
(Very Easy, Easy, Moderate, Hard, Very Hard)
  - Food
  - Transportation
  - Pace of Life
  - Clothes
  - Academic workload
  - People's behavior
7. AGREE or DISAGREE with the following statements:  
(Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)
  - It was hard to communicate what I learned and experienced abroad to my FAMILY members.
  - It was hard to communicate what I learned and experienced abroad to my FRIENDS.
8. After studying abroad, did you become more critical of American:
  - Values
  - Style of life
  - Political system
  - Social system
  - Education
  - I was not critical
9. After studying abroad, did you become more appreciative of American:
  - Values
  - Style of life
  - Political system
  - Social system
  - Education
  - I did not become appreciative

10. After studying abroad, what skills did you develop or improve? (Choose all that Apply)

- Communication skills
- Foreign language skills
- Critical thinking
- Confidence
- Cross-cultural perspective
- Independence
- Responsibility
- Tolerance
- Problem solving
- Expanded perspective of the world
- Learned more about my abilities
- Learned more about my strengths and weaknesses
- Other (please specify)

#### *Reflections on Your Experience*

1. Did you visit UND Coming Back Party after you came back to the U.S. after studying abroad?

- Yes
- No

2. If NO, why didn't you go? (Check ALL that apply)

- I did not want to talk about my experience to strangers.
- I did not know about it.
- I did not think it was important.
- I did not think it could help me.
- I did not care.
- I was not available.
- Other (please specify).

3. If YES, how did it benefit you? (Check ALL that apply)

- It was helpful in providing me with the information on what I could do with my new experience.
- It gave me an opportunity to talk to other students about my study abroad experience.
- It helped me to understand that I was not the only one experiencing discomfort after coming back.
- I made friends with other students who studied abroad.
- Other (please specify)

4. Choose ALL of the following statements on what you want to do with your study abroad experience in the future with which you AGREE.

- I want to study abroad again
- I want to share my experience of studying abroad with other students.



- I do not know how to use my study abroad experience.
  - I want to forget my experience abroad.
  - I wish I had someone who could teach me how to use study abroad experience in the future.
  - I wish there was a Reentry Orientation when I came back that can teach me about the adjustment to my own culture and how I can use my experience abroad.
5. Do you think it is necessary to design a Re-Entry Orientation for students who just came back from studying abroad to help them re-adjust to their own culture?
    - Yes
    - No
  6. Please, share your advice on how to deal with re-entry with new students who will study abroad in the future.

### *Understanding Culture*

1. What did "culture" mean to you BEFORE you studied abroad?
2. Did your understanding of "culture" change after studying abroad?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Not sure
3. If YES, how did it change?
4. What did you learn about a foreign culture WHILE studying abroad?
  - Learned more about history
  - Learned more about different traditions/values
  - Learned more about how things can be done differently
  - Improved my foreign language skills
  - Did not learn anything
  - Learned something else
5. What did you learn about YOUR culture when you came back from studying abroad?
6. Did your perception of the world change AFTER studying abroad?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Not sure
7. If YES, in what way did your perception of the world change?

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